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The agony and the eschatology: apocalyptic thought in New England Evangelical Calvinism from Jonathan Edwards to Lyman Beecher

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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Dissertation

**THE AGONY AND THE ESCHATOLOGY:
APOCALYPTIC THOUGHT IN NEW ENGLAND EVANGELICAL CALVINISM
FROM JONATHAN EDWARDS TO LYMAN BEECHER**

by

PAUL CHOI

B.A., Boston University, 1997
A.M., Boston University, 2002
M.Div., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2005
S.T.M., Yale Divinity School, 2008

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Approved by

First Reader

Christopher H. Evans, Ph.D.
Professor of the History of Christianity and Methodist Studies

Second Reader

Rady Roldán-Figueroa, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of the History of Christianity

And at the same time that he offered up his blood for souls, [he] offered up also, as their High Priest, "strong crying and tears" [Hebrews 5:7], with an extreme agony, wherein the soul of Christ was as it were in travail for the souls of the elect; and therefore in saving them he is said to "see of the travail of his soul" [Isaiah 53:11]. As such a spirit of love to, and concern for souls was the spirit of Christ, so it is the spirit of the church; and therefore the church, in desiring and seeking that Christ might be brought forth in the world, and in the souls of men, is represented, Revelation 12:2, as a woman crying, "travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered."

Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, 1743

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In her novel, *The Ministry's Wooing*, Harriet Beecher Stowe referred to Jonathan Edwards's hellfire sermons as "the refined poetry of torture." While torture might be too strong a word to describe the dissertation process, *agony* seems fitting. Perhaps I'm recalling the hint of agony on the faces of my advisors whenever I stared blankly back at them waiting for inspiration during the dry spells of research and writing. I would like to thank Prof. Christopher Evans for his unwavering support and guidance throughout the entire doctoral program. I thank Prof. Rady Roldan-Figueroa for refusing to accept a low bar and setting a high standard for me to follow from the beginning. I really didn't deserve their gracious patience. I would like to thank Dean Bryan Stone and the Advanced Studies Committee for being generous and always granting me the extra time I needed to finish. I thank Prof. Dana Robert for her mentorship and advice and the faculty, staff, and peers at the School of Theology for providing a nurturing spiritual community. I would like to thank Prof. Kenneth Minkema for providing the initial spark for this dissertation while working with him on my S.T.M. thesis at the Yale Divinity School. I am grateful for the careful attention he gave to the introduction, offering helpful insights and comments from his unequalled knowledge of Edwards. I want to thank the helpful staff at the libraries of BU School of Theology and Mugar, the Sterling Memorial and Beinecke Rare Book libraries at Yale, Goddard Library at Gordon-Conwell, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Congregational Archives and Library, and the Forbes Library in Northampton. I truly believe if the world were run by librarians, not only would it be more organized and efficient, but kinder, generous, and giving.

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PAUL CHOI

Boston University School of Theology, 2021

Major Professor: Christopher H. Evans, Professor of the History of Christianity and
Methodist Studies

ABSTRACT

This dissertation contributes to the study of American Christianity by tracing the apocalyptic thought of New England evangelical Calvinism from Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) to Lyman Beecher (1775-1863). Covering the period of the First Great Awakening in the eighteenth century to the dawn of the Second Great Awakening in the nineteenth century, the study identifies Edwards as the progenitor of a distinctive tradition of Calvinist apocalyptic thought. Edwardsean historical-redemptive apocalypticism highlights the “work of redemption” as the unfolding spiritual drama of conversion enacted in various historical stages. Its three-fold emphasis is on revivalism, the afflictive nature of church history, and the cosmic dimensions of an overarching redemptive narrative culminating in Christ’s Second Coming.

Edwards’s immediate disciples, Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) and Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), reinterpreted their mentor’s insights to create an Edwardsean school of New England “New Divinity” thought. Beneath the veneer of New Divinity theology was a strong undercurrent of Edwardsean apocalypticism, which the second generation Edwardseans adapted to reflect the young nation’s call to social action. The

revivals of the Second Great Awakening were driven in large part by the millennial spirit of this New Divinity apocalyptic tradition.

Due to rapid societal changes at the turn of the century, Edwardseans of the third generation led the efforts in institutionalizing religious and moral reform activities. Along with this Protestant “kingdom building” came a shift in Edwardsean eschatological priorities. It moved away from the central Edwardsean motif of conversion/redemption to moralism—from a theology centered upon otherworldly apocalypticism toward a greater focus on societal reform. This transition from subsuming the grand narrative of redemption under the overall rubric of God’s sovereignty to one that viewed the millennium in relation to humanistic moral reform was led by Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), who serves as the representative of the “millennial turn” in Edwardsean apocalypticism during the Second Great Awakening. An overview of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought between the two Great Awakenings provides historians an important window to connect and interpret the development of New England Calvinist eschatology that few have explored in depth. These ideas continue to enlighten our understanding of modern-day iterations of evangelical eschatology.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAP.....	Annals of the American Pulpit
ABCFM.....	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
ACELB	Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc. of Lyman Beecher
AV.....	Authorized (King James) Version
BW	Beecher's Works: Sermons Delivered on Various Occasions
CEM.....	Connecticut Evangelical Magazine
FAUS	Free African Union Society
HONT	The Harmony of the Old and New Testaments
HWR.....	A History of the Work of Redemption
WJB.....	The Works of Joseph Bellamy
WJE.....	The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Yale Edition)
WNE	The Works of Nathanael Emmons
WRJB.....	The Works of the Reverend Joseph Bellamy
WSH.....	The Works of Samuel Hopkins

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 *The Camp of the Saints*, an obscure book first published in 1973 by a conservative French author, made headlines in America when it was revealed that several prominent figures in government had embraced its xenophobic message.¹ While only the most apocalyptically astute of Americans would have recognized the original source of the book's title, there was a group within Christian religious circles who not only knew of its origins in the Book of Revelation, they were also heavily influenced by its apocalyptic imagery and symbolism.² Indeed, America has had a long-standing fascination with the *eschaton*, the last things or the end of days. Eschatological sentiments can be found throughout American history in both intellectual and popular culture. In addition to eschatological language being abundant in religion— theology, ecclesiology, homiletics, devotionals, hymnody, and apologetics—it is common in the secular realms of literature, music and the arts, entertainment, newspapers and media, politics, and much more. The daunting task for the historian, then, is putting these eschatological references into proper historical context and making worldly sense of what are essentially other-worldly beliefs. To be sure, this exercise is vast, unwieldy, and fraught with difficulties, but due to the pervasiveness and resilience of eschatological themes and thought patterns, I would argue that no overarching American religious narrative can overlook this fundamental idea that history follows a biblically-prophesized, teleological end.

¹ Elian Peltier and Nicholas Kulish, “A Racist Book’s Malign and Lingering Influence,” *New York Times*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/22/books/stephen-miller-camp-saints.html>.

² The reference is from Revelation 20:9 which describes an army from Gog and Magog gathered by Satan surrounding “the camp of the saints.”

The influence of eschatology in America is a rich source of inquiry that can be mined for further historical insights. If permitted to entertain an analogy, in the complex tune of American Christianity, eschatology is the bass line—perhaps on a superficial hearing difficult to register, but one that is constant, providing a sustaining rhythm and emitting deep and layered undertones. This work will seek to enhance this resonance by tracing the historical outlines of eschatological thought in American Christianity between two significant historical periods—namely, the First and Second Great Awakenings.³ Close attention is given here to a particular trajectory of eschatological thought, that is, the New England evangelical Calvinistic line of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and his disciples. After Edwards and the First Great Awakening in New England several generations of the intellectual and spiritual heirs of the “Edwardsean” evangelical eschatological tradition spread their influence beyond New England and greatly impacted the agenda and tenor of the Second Great Awakening in the nineteenth century.⁴

³ The First Great Awakening is usually associated with the New England and Mid-Atlantic revivals in the early 1740s, catalyzed by the itinerant preaching of George Whitefield, although the “little revival” of 1734-35 in Northampton and surrounding towns nearby may be seen as its precursor. The Second Great Awakening is usually dated as beginning in the late 1780s and lasting into the 1830s. Peripheral arguments about whether these periodic occurrences warrant historical distinction are largely outside the scope of the dissertation. It should be noted, however, that although the uneven distribution and influence of the Awakenings throughout the colonies are acknowledged, the author generally accepts the appropriateness of these historical designations. For further discussion, see Harry Stout, “Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,” in *Religion in American History: A Reader*, ed. Jon Butler and Harry Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89 and Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,” in *Religion in American History: A Reader*, 110. See also Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). Frank Lambert, *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Also Joseph Conforti, “Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795-1842,” *Early American Literature* 26, no. 2 (1991): 99-118.

⁴ The tradition of Jonathan Edwards is sometimes referred to as Edwardean or with a different spelling “Edwardsian.” The dissertation will utilize the most common term, “Edwardsean.”

Of special interest is the meaning of the historical-redemptive mode of conversion, which served as a central motif in Edwardsean eschatology. For Edwards, revivalism was God's preferred method of inducing conversion within history, redemption its consummation. Conversion was not just an evangelical concern, it served as an adumbration of deeper, spiritual things to come. Starting with his own "agony" over the tortuous process of his personal salvation, Edwards saw in this individual spiritual drama a larger picture of God's work in creation. For Edwards the economy of salvation was the currency of Christ's redemption history, it was evidence of the great unfolding of God's grand plan for humankind. Just as conversion marked a believer's beginning, it also inaugurated the ongoing progress toward a redemptive ending. Thus, the "agony" of the birth pangs of conversion was intimately connected to the "agony" of birth pangs in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming.

It is this interplay between ultimate human redemption and the end times that provides the dynamic thrust to the Edwardsean line of evangelical eschatology. As it will be seen, the historical-redemptive motif runs throughout the major theological works that will be examined. It is a thread that connects the First and Second Awakenings as well as to the revivalistic tradition of evangelicalism ever since. Overall, the dissertation seeks to highlight the continuities and consistencies of one important line of American Christian eschatology. In the end it will be shown that the legacy and heritage of eschatological themes explored by Edwards and his theological heirs continue to be significant factors in our understanding of American evangelicalism and more specifically, the modern-day iterations of evangelical eschatology.

Significance of the Problem

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American religious thought with a focus on eschatology. Before proceeding, clarification on the usage of difficult terms would prove helpful. As far back as 1978 New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall wrote that eschatology, a word coined in the nineteenth century, is both useful and dangerous, with a warning that, “We cannot abolish the use of the word, but we can at least handle it with the care that we would bestow on any valuable but slippery object.”⁵ The concern is certainly warranted. However, after having perused a number of sources related to eschatology, many of which are of high scholarly value, I have yet to encounter a work where the term is used consistently without some slipperiness and ambiguity. Such is the elusive nature of the topic; the language at times fails to approach a certain preciseness.

With that caveat, the two terms within eschatology that are most pertinent for this study are apocalypticism and millennialism. Apocalypticism in the Christian tradition is usually associated with the immanence of the end times and the corresponding belief that this will be ushered in by some kind of cataclysmic event as prophesized in several books of the Bible.⁶ Although in our modern usage, “apocalypse” or “apocalyptic” is most often

⁵ I Howard Marshall, “Slippery Words: I. Eschatology,” *The Expository Times* 89 (June 1978): 264-269. Quoted in Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 268.

⁶ See Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World as We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 11-12. Wojcik defines apocalypticism as “beliefs and discourses that assert that the cataclysmic destruction of the world is inevitable and unalterable by human effort” but acknowledges that it’s somewhat academically unconventional and even controversial. Biblical references related to the apocalypse include: Revelation 7:1-17; 12:1-17; 14:13; 17:8-10; Ezekiel 38:1-4; Zechariah 14:2

equated with the event that signals the end of the world, when Puritans spoke or wrote of the “Apocalypse,” it was in reference to the biblical Book of Revelation.⁷ Over the years apocalypticism has acquired many layers of meanings but Bernard McGinn, one of the foremost experts on medieval apocalyptic texts, eschews a definitive catch-all definition, noting it is a “highly complex phenomenon, where “single-minded interpretations are immediately suspect,” and “to reduce apocalypticism to a clear and distinct idea may well be to sacrifice understanding for illusory clarity.”⁸ Likewise, millennialism defies a singular definition but in its most narrow sense it is the notion that the apocalyptic end of human history would usher in either the beginning or the end of the millennial period, or a thousand year reign of Christ and the saints on this earth.⁹

In many ways these two concepts intersect—the agony of the apocalypse leads to the ecstasy of the millennium, or perhaps vice versa depending on one’s viewpoint.¹⁰

⁷ For instance, Jonathan Edwards’s *Notes on the Apocalypse* is his commentary on the Book of Revelation. See Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on the Apocalypse, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 5, Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

⁸ Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Tradition in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 3.

⁹ Stephen J. Stein, “American Millennial Visions: Towards Construction of a New Architectonic of American Apocalypticism,” in *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus Thorkell Bernhardsson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 376n1. Stein’s narrow definition of millennialism is “the belief in a 1,000-year period of earthly peace and prosperity.” Biblical references of the millennium include: Revelation 20:1-3; Micah 3:1-4; Isaiah 11:4-9. For Stein, apocalypticism is the broader term. As far as I can tell, since eschatology as a term was not in circulation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when commentators back then used “millennium” they were referring to either the narrow sense of the thousand-year reign of Christ or the general eschatological sense of the end times. For the most part it was the preferred or rather convenient term for what would, in the late nineteenth century, become “eschatology.”

¹⁰ The distinctions between the different iterations of millennialism will be explored in detail in Chapter 3.

Both apocalypticism and millennialism are important and ubiquitous eschatological concepts but the literature has not been able to establish a consensus on definitions. Most works on eschatology therefore use apocalypticism, millennialism, millenarianism, chiliasm and many other derivatives interchangeably. An effort will be made nevertheless to maintain some integrity of definitions. However, the overall approach will be one of humble acceptance that certain theological distinctions between these terms can only serve as approximations toward an ideal and often best understood within a broader conceptual framework without the constraints of artificial definitional boundaries.

Another term that merits attention is evangelicalism. The group that took biblical eschatology most seriously in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was one that came to be identified as evangelicals.¹¹ Historians continue to debate the exact definition of evangelicalism; it is usually associated with an emphasis on conversion, the New Birth, or a “born again” experience, missions and evangelism, a strong Biblicism, and crucicentrism, with its focus on the atoning work of Christ on the cross.¹² No single interpretation of biblical eschatology during the colonial period achieved the status of

¹¹ The beginnings of American evangelicalism are closely associated with Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and the First Great Awakening. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century evangelicalism should not be confused with the conflated evangelicalism/fundamentalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For further discussion, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Marsden describes fundamentalism as “anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism.”

¹² David Bebbington’s classic quadrilateral of evangelicalism includes: conversionism, activism (evangelism and missions), biblicism, and crucicentrism (emphasizing Christ’s atoning work on the cross). See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-3. I generally subscribe to Bebbington’s definition as descriptive of eighteenth-century evangelicalism, though arguably the quadrilateral does not necessarily distinguish between evangelicals from their Puritan forerunners. As even Bebbington acknowledges, this may be a case where it is more a matter of degree than difference.

orthodoxy but evangelicals on the whole were the most invested in a serious study of biblical texts in regards to the end times. In turn, they took their interpretations and speculations of eschatological biblical texts seriously, in a manner that to modern sensibilities might seem obsessive or at the very least, strange.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) is the figure who stands at the forefront of this emergent colonial evangelical eschatology, which combined Puritan piety with evangelical revivalist zeal and a robust end-times theology. As a point of departure, the study will begin by closely examining his life and apocalyptic writings. By beginning with Edwards, who is widely considered the purveyor *par excellence* of the colonial eschatological mind, I will explore the socio-historical context of apocalyptic ideas during the period of the First Great Awakening and its aftermath. It is instructive that of all of Edwards's writings, his only stand-alone biblical commentary was on Revelation. That such an influential figure was consumed by the apocalyptic lends credence to an atmosphere of eschatological anticipation during his time. Edwards was one of the major creators of the rich eschatological ethos in colonial America. And it was mainly through the filter of Edwards that eschatological interest became entrenched in the revivalist traditions of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries.

After the Second Great Awakening, however, Edwards's apocalyptic writings were either forgotten, neglected, or summarily dismissed for nearly a century. One of the earliest scholars of the twentieth century to acknowledge a strong connection between Jonathan Edwards and eschatology was H. Richard Niebuhr in his influential work, *The*

Kingdom of God in America.¹³ But writing in the 1930s, Niebuhr did not have access to all of Edwards's copious writings on Revelation and other related topics so his assessment was limited, though it served as a small step in the recovery of Edwardsean eschatology.¹⁴ In the middle of the century the eminent Harvard historian Perry Miller was instrumental in reviving interest in New England Puritanism and in particular the genius of Jonathan Edwards. But Miller's interpretation of Edwards was a rationalist in the mold of John Locke (1632-1704), whose Enlightenment reasoning was far ahead of his time; Edwards's apocalyptic bent was noted almost apologetically by Miller as a side-note curiosity.¹⁵ So although during the first half of the twentieth century scholars were aware of Edwards's interest in eschatology it was usually not a focal point of their scholarship.

It was not until 1959 when Clarence C. Goen, then a graduate student at Yale, published an influential article titled: "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," that Edwards's eschatology began to garner wider attention.¹⁶ In it Goen laid out an argument that Edwards popularized for America a postmillennial view of

¹³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Chicago: Willet, Clark, 1937).

¹⁴ For instance, perhaps in an effort to rescue Edwards from identification with the emerging Christian fundamentalists of his time, Niebuhr noted that Edwards did not "engage in the mathematical calculations and astrological speculations of the literalists." See Niebuhr, *Kingdom of God*, 144. While technically Edwards did not fiddle with astrology, his notebooks reveal he was very much given to calculating dates based on biblical prophecies and historical events. In many ways Edwards was a literalist.

¹⁵ See Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (1949; repr., Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981). 2.

¹⁶ C.C. Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," *Church History* 28, no. 1 (March 1959): 25-40.

history, an interpretation of Christian eschatology that Christ's second coming will come at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ, as opposed to the premillennial view that saw Christ's second coming occurring before the millennium. Goen saw this "new departure" of Edwards as having introduced an innovation in American eschatology that would serve as a catalyst for the idea of progress.¹⁷

Following Goen, a number of scholars saw Edwards as America's first postmillennialist or at least a proto-postmillennialist.¹⁸ This characterization remains the predominant interpretation even to this day. But various historians over the past half century have questioned the significance of Edwards's postmillennialism. They make a compelling argument that postmillennialism and premillennialism are not ideal categories for assessing eighteenth-century Puritan eschatology.¹⁹ Most likely Edwards and his contemporaries would have rejected such labels. Because Edwards's writings on the end times are layered and as I argue, based largely upon his conception of redemptive history, it is too reductionist to hold him to a particular millennial camp. In truth, Edwards's nuanced ambiguity on matters regarding the millennium reflects the general complexities

¹⁷ While Goen is largely credited with this "New Departure" in Edwards's eschatology, James Davidson identifies Serano Dwight, great-grandson of Edwards and editor of Edwards's ten-volume *Works*, to have posited similar conclusions in the nineteenth century. Serano E. Dwight, ed. *The Work of President Edwards: with a Memoir of His Life*, vol. 1-10 (New York: S. Converse, 1829-30). See James W. Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 270n20.

¹⁸ James W. Davidson, "Searching for the Millennium: Problems for the 1790's and the 1970's," *The New England Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (June 1972): 242.

¹⁹ See Stephen J. Stein, editor's introduction to *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 5, Apocalyptic Writings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 7n6. See also Davidson, "Searching for the Millennium," 241-254. Davidson focuses his discussion on millennialists of the 1790s and finds the distinctions between pre and post millennialists to be artificial and the terms ultimately unhelpful. Also Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 43-44.

of eschatological thought and this is evident in both the so-called premillennialists and postmillennialists of the eighteenth century. Moving beyond these categories would help in identifying better filters for analyzing the critical period around the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening.

This reassessment of Edwards's premillennial/post millennial divide is but one example of the fruits of reframing a conventional narrative with fresh eschatological eyes. One of the aims of an in-depth study of Edwards's updated eschatological oeuvre is to question such commonly held assumptions and generalizations. Over the past half-century there have been significant advancements in the study of Jonathan Edwards. And although Edwards's eschatology has been closely examined in a wide array of historical contexts, a study that spans the period from the beginning of evangelicalism in the early 1700s to the complex period of the burgeoning of religious identities during the Second Great Awakening would be instructive. It is anticipated that fresh insights into Edwardsean eschatology will provide grounds for renewed perspectives on the eschatological works of the successive generations of his disciples as well.

Having discussed the complexities of definitions earlier, the umbrella term I will utilize for the exploration of an Edwardsean eschatological lineage will be "apocalyptic thought." In the narrower study of Edwards, within the taxonomy of overlapping and confusing terminology, apocalypticism is preferred over eschatology or millennialism as perhaps a happy medium. Bernard McGinn contends that the term apocalypticism has significant literary value through the "abundant use of symbols, allegorical figures, and rhetorical devices," and "highly dramatic in form" in presenting an imaginatively visceral

ending to a story with “its most basic structure of a threefold pattern of crisis, judgment, and salvation.”²⁰ Edwards sought to interpret the pages of this dramatic story using the full force of his religious imagination. Often quoted, Perry Miller once wrote: “In America the greatest artist of the apocalypse was, of course, Jonathan Edwards.”²¹ Edwards was a well-known aesthete and Miller is not being hyperbolic in referring to him as an *artist* of the apocalypse. The apocalyptic served at various points in time as his muse, medium, and canvas. As apocalypticism contains multitudes of interpretive value, it opens the inquiry to complexities that are not as accessible in alternative terminology. For instance, it conveys the double sense of the agony and ecstasy of redemptive conversion. It has the sense of an anticipation of something right around the corner, the paradox of the “already not yet” and the imminent presentism of a realized eschatology. It highlights the dramatic, dynamic and creative—hence the artistic— aspects of Edwards’s apocalyptic thought. In short, apocalypticism is millennialism with an edge.

More specifically, I summarize the essence of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought as historical-redemptive apocalypticism. When Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), one of the founders of the philosophical school of American pragmatism, felt his work was being misconstrued, he once threatened to change his brand of pragmatism to pragmaticism, “a name ugly enough to be kept safe from kidnappers.”²² Likewise, while historical-redemptive apocalypticism as a term is aesthetically unpleasant as to be safe

²⁰ McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 6.

²¹ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1956), 233.

²² Eugene Taylor, introduction to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, by William James (London: Routledge, 2002), xxv.

from adoption, it does capture in many ways the spirit of the discourse. Its three main elements are: 1) revivalistic. Edwards saw the history of the work of redemption as proceeding mainly through revivals; 2) afflictive. The historical advancement toward the end of the world would be uneven and marked by both agony and ecstasy. Edwards often used this afflictive model as a prophetic tool to critique culture regardless of circumstance or social situation; it served as a mirroring effect on society as the ethical component of eschatology;²³ and 3) cosmic. Edwards's historical-redemptive method was an attempt to convey an apocalyptic narrative from God's point of view as the Alpha and Omega, one that transcended temporality while also encompassing the universal and the particular, a dynamic, dramatic story of both cosmic and intimate proportions.²⁴ Edwards was the unique figure who could wax rhapsodic about the sovereignty of God and his ultimate design for humankind's redemption all the while scanning the newspapers every day to calculate the Catholic Church's financial ledger, in a manner similar to how a young baseball fan of a bygone era would check the daily box scores to calculate batting averages. For Edwards, the apocalyptic was all-encompassing, touching every aspect of his life. He was both artist and archivist of the apocalyptic.

²³ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 129-132. Davidson uses the term "afflictive model of progress" to explain how the dialectical paradox of optimism and affliction leads to a certain progress of religiosity. My use of the afflictive model downplays the idea of progress and emphasizes the ethical critique of society based on the hope of future redemption.

²⁴ J.F. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism," *William and Mary Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (April 1975): 226. For Maclear a distinguishing factor between the eschatology of the Puritans and Protestants is the cosmic dimension of the former, which sees the Christian as a soldier of Christ in an epic spiritual battle against sin and Satan. My definition of cosmic is broader but certainly affirms this aspect of Puritan eschatology. For Edwards's philosophy of history as deriving from God's point of view, see Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's History of Philosophy: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 225.

Edwards's disciples carried the legacy of this historical-redemptive apocalypticism to varying degrees of success. After Edwards, the narrative shifts to the first generation of Edwardseans who continued to build upon his eschatological passions after his death in 1758. They sustained the relevance of Edwards's "New England theology" by consolidating his Calvinistic writings into a consistent framework that was referred to as New Divinity or Hopkinsian theology, after Edwards's closest disciple, Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803).²⁵ Not only were they attuned to advancing Edwards's Calvinism in a consistent and acceptable manner, his immediate disciples largely shared his passion for eschatology. They furthered Edwards's apocalyptic thought through their writings during the pre and post-revolutionary period. Following Edwards, their eschatology went hand in hand with their practical soteriology. For example, they stressed the importance of converting Indians and African slaves as part of the necessary steps toward ushering in Christ's kingdom. As such they were early proponents of the anti-slavery movement and catalysts for ever-expanding mission fields. Many of them also played significant roles in framing the connection between religion and politics. They were generally supportive of the push for American independence and in the aftermath of the Revolution they worked to implement a particular religious vision for the newly formed republic.²⁶

²⁵ Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 15n5.

²⁶ Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1981), 147.

The second generation of Edwardseans built upon this tradition during the critical period when the first rumblings of the Second Great Awakening began in the late 1780s. The turn of the century saw the rapid explosion of religious creativity and diversity that fanned the flames of these revivals. Through the ministry and efforts of a new generation of religious leaders reared on New Divinity training, nineteenth-century eschatology reflected a more visibly activist, social and ethical dimension. This was the period of the systematization and institutionalization of evangelical apocalyptic thought through revival meetings, prophecy conferences, and social reform movements. Edwards's often inaccessible apocalyptic thought was given a populist turn by the third generation of his disciples. In essence, eschatological ethos gave way to eschatological ethics.²⁷ The effects of this shift is especially evident during the height of the Second Great Awakening and the figure who best embodies the legacy of Edwards during this period is Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), who at the time was perhaps America's most famous clergyman. Through Beecher, Edwards's apocalyptic vision based on God's master plan of redemption was cast into a vision for the redemption and transformation of society.²⁸ This change would continue to be manifested in later iterations of American eschatology and it serves as a

²⁷ Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14, 103, 106, 113. Also E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 507.

²⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 152.

historical and symbolic reminder that apocalyptic thought is not just abstract theology or ideology, but a factor in the *praxis* of Christianity.²⁹

The overall projection of the dissertation is threefold: First, through an examination of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought, it will highlight the convergences of apocalyptic thought between the First and Second Great Awakenings. A detailed exploration of the historical-redemptive view of conversion in the apocalyptic works of Edwards and his followers will advance an argument that soteriology based on an afflictive model of “agony” turning into redemptive glory was a powerful framework for navigating a pilgrim’s spiritual journey through the uncertainties of this life in preparation for the certainties of the next. In effecting the Second Great Awakening, Edwardseans continued to recreate the eschatological meaning of revival through this lens of redemptive history. Second, through Edwards’s disciples—from the first generation down to Lyman Beecher in the third—the study seeks to parse their apocalyptic thought and pinpoint the beginnings of a millennial turn during the Second Great Awakening. After the Revolution, there was an important, albeit subtle shift of emphasis from Edwardsean ethical eschatology to a Beecherian eschatological ethics. Although a shift between these periods from piety to moralism is a well-attested historical narrative, the study explores the uneven complexities of this transition through an eschatological framework.³⁰ Lastly, it will be shown that while Edwardsean

²⁹ Matthew A. Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), xii-xiii.

³⁰ Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology* (1932; repr., New York: Harper Torchbook, 1970).

apocalyptic thought lost its influence toward the latter part of the Second Great Awakening it never went away completely.³¹ The prophetic voice of the Edwardsean eschatological critique of culture continued to be an essential characteristic of evangelical apocalyptic thought, which can be seen in various manifestations of American evangelicalism to this day.

Method of Investigation

As an historical study of apocalyptic thought, the study will utilize methods consistent with intellectual history, particularly within the tradition of scholars writing on eighteenth and nineteenth-century American religion. Intellectual history examines how ideas influence history and how history influences ideas.³² In examining eschatological works, there is always a temptation for the historian to read back into these texts and especially at the more eccentric beliefs, ask even if subconsciously: Did they really believe this? At times this may lead to unhelpful psychological characterizations of

³¹ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins*, 184.

³² The dialogical method of intellectual history seeks to have a reciprocal conversation between the text and context, the historical situation and the modern interpretation of it. See Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 27-28. The conversations with the historical texts also imply an open-endedness with the questions posed without the idealistic search for conclusive answers. Utilizing the concepts of the “culture as appropriation” and the “circulation of ideas” advanced by Roger Chartier enables the historian to employ the methods of intellectual history that are also informed by issues relating to cultural and social history. For example, what does it mean that Edwards’s eschatology took a populist turn? Can such a turn be measured by the reach of the dissemination of ideas? Are there defining boundaries of popular culture and do they change over time? The connections of texts with the broader, popular culture will recognize the immense complexities in the interconnections between ideas, culture, language, and people. For further discussion on intellectual history and methodology, see David Hall, introduction to *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), 13. Also Roger Chartier, “Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France,” in *Understanding Popular Culture*, 229-254.

individuals or groups. But the robustness of this study is predicated on taking the people, ideas, and events related to their apocalyptic thought seriously. Many of the major figures who wrote the primary sources were at the center of their social spheres and not on the periphery. Key figures such as Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Hopkins, Timothy Dwight, and Lyman Beecher were movers and shakers in their communities so that what they wrote and thought and acted upon have to be accorded a certain amount of social cache and intellectual currency. This perspective will inform the analysis of the works of the major evangelical religious leaders of the day.

The narrative is structured through a close reading of selected primary sources and in the case of the First Great Awakening, these works were the province of intellectual elites. An important methodological question regarding the source materials is: How did they translate to the general population? How do you get at the heart of the common people whose voice is not readily discernible from the data at hand? Herein lies the scope of the problem in early American intellectual history—even though the First Great Awakening is significant for being a movement that held popular appeal for communities throughout the New England and Mid-Atlantic colonies, what is the evidence that the apocalyptic writings of the elites reached the masses? Apocalyptic sermons were preached and heard by many but can we assume they resonated with the broader audience in a meaningful way?

There are no easy answers to these questions but a comparison of two periods can provide greater understanding. A historian of intellectual history can extrapolate from the data and make connections to analogous situations and similar circumstances. Earlier

models of consensus between elite and lay religious thought will serve as frameworks for understanding the dynamic between intellectual and popular beliefs. In this sense, a contextualized comparison of the First Great Awakening with the Second Great Awakening is of great importance because it is in the nineteenth century where we begin to see the historical transcripts of the people that include newspapers, tracts, correspondences and much more. The egalitarian impulse of nineteenth-century America opened the floodgates for the democratization of such pursuits as speculating about the end times. The bubbling of millennial religious activity is reflected in the number of millenarian communities such as the Shakers and Mormons that formed during this time.³³ If one is able to make associations between the people of the nineteenth century with people of the eighteenth, then it is possible to make educated inferences using the historical imagination.

For the most part, the study will be a chronological historical narrative of one particular line of evangelical apocalyptic thought from the First Great Awakening to the Second Great Awakening. This “Introduction” lays out the problem and its setting. Chapter One then presents a brief history of Protestant apocalyptic thought as a way to establish the backdrop of colonial New England as fertile ground for eschatological reflection and introduces Jonathan Edwards as a figure most representative of the transition from Puritan to evangelical apocalyptic thought. It will paint in broad strokes the rich historical background from which Edwards drew his eschatological worldview.

³³ J.F.C Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979).

The chapter will then proceed with examining Edwards's early life and writings, especially the works associated with his apocalyptic thought

Chapter Two covers Edwards's apocalyptic focus after the preaching of his "Redemption Discourse." It will follow the course of Edward's historical-redemptive apocalypticism through the First Great Awakening to his dismissal from Northampton. Chapter Three covers Edwards's time as a missionary and his fruitful years of reflection and writing in the Indian community of Stockbridge, to his brief tenure as president of Princeton. The final section of the chapter will cover Edwards's eschatological legacy beginning with a close analysis of *A History of the Work of Redemption*, followed by a recapitulation of several key themes. The latter two chapters will highlight how seminal events in Edwards's life seemed to correspond to his historical-redemptive apocalypticism, giving it its dynamic edge as a "realized" eschatology. Chapter Four will mainly cover the life and works of Edwards's closest immediate disciples, Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790). Their contributions to repackaging Edwards's historical-redemptive apocalypticism will be emphasized. Chapter Five will feature Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Edwards's grandson, as the most prominent second-generation Edwardsean. Following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Dwight chose the path of a theologian minister. His poems and sermons place his works within the purview of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought but in many ways he put his stamp on redefining its focus. Dwight would go on to train a number of prominent New Divinity clergymen through his position as president of Yale.

Chapter Six features the final generation of Edwardseans and especially the life and works of Lyman Beecher (1775-1863). As a crucial figure of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, Beecher will serve to bookend this study. In Beecher we begin to see a major turn from Edwardsean apocalyptic thought as a theological program to one focused more on ethics—populist, activist, and socially-conscious. Beecher believed that a twofold strategy of evangelizing the world through missions and a moral regeneration of America would usher in the Second Coming of Christ.³⁴ Furthermore, his tireless effort to foment conversion during the Second Great Awakening was intimately related to his millennial vision. At the height of the Second Great Awakening, Beecher's more radical followers armed with an imminent millennial vision began to push the boundaries of social reform by fighting for the universal emancipation of slaves and eventually of women.³⁵ Beecher is a fitting representative of both the continuity *with* and a departure *from* the Edwardsean legacy in the period of the Second Great Awakening. Finally, the Conclusion will sum up the historical analysis of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought, seeking to show how this legacy contributes to a broader understanding of eschatology in American evangelicalism.

Limitations

Understanding that the topic and scope of any historical endeavor cannot be comprehensive, I nevertheless advance on several fronts. First, the study will be on eschatology in America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While eschatology

³⁴ Howe, *Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 152.

³⁵ Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

of the English divines figures prominently in the context of Edwards in the First Great Awakening, by the Second Great Awakening the rich eschatological tradition of trans-Atlantic eschatology that had developed during this time will not be covered. Second, the study will focus on a specific spectrum of apocalyptic thought, the Calvinistic, mostly Congregational, revivalistic tradition of New England evangelicalism. Although an argument can be made that evangelicalism cuts across all branches of Christianity, the theological and intellectual roots of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century evangelicalism was primarily a Protestant, Calvinist domain.³⁶ Thus, aside from the important Arminian-influenced revivalism of Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) that challenged New Divinity leaders in the Second Great Awakening, the eschatological outlook of emerging Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Restorationists, Quakers, Shakers, Mormons, and other prominent groups of early American Christianity will not be considered with any depth here. Third, the textual analysis will primarily seek the connection between apocalyptic thought and the evangelical motif of conversion/redemption as a way to frame Edwardsean eschatology into a broader historical and theological context. Following a limited scope of research will help guide the narrative and provide a focused platform for further thematic explorations that contribute to the wider history of New England Edwardsean theology in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

The scope of this project is to build upon past historical studies, suggest fresh avenues of interpretation, fill in gaps where needed, and provide coherent analysis of the

³⁶ Noll, *America's God*, 7.

disparate patterns in the patchwork of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought between the two Great Awakenings. James Davidson, in the preface to his book *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, writes that the logic of millennial thought of influential New Englanders of the era cannot be compartmentalized from their overall worldview.³⁷ Unlike historians who have written mostly about the variances of millennial thought, Davidson's work emphasizes the continuities of the logic of millennial thinking throughout the eighteenth century. The dissertation follows in the spirit of Davidson's quest for continuity. Underlying the historical, theological, socio-cultural, and exegetical study of the Edwardsean line of apocalyptic thought will be an effort to find a measure of consistency in the approach to an understanding of America's enduring fascination with the end times.

³⁷ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, ix.

CHAPTER ONE

The Socio-historical Context of Jonathan Edwards's Early Apocalyptic Thought

Jonathan Edwards is universally recognized as one of America's most influential figures—a pastor, theologian, missionary, philosopher and thinker. He was a prolific writer and his intellectual journey started at an early age when he developed a lifelong habit of keeping a journal and taking copious personal notes on a wide range of religious topics. The search for the essence of Edwards is an ongoing endeavor which has created a cottage industry of sorts of Edwards scholars from a broad spectrum of religious, historical, and philosophical persuasions.³⁸ His body of work has been appropriated and embraced by admirers as well as maligned and undermined by critics. This is in part due to his deep and nuanced thinking; Edwards's works will continue to be interpreted and reinterpreted by successive generations.

³⁸ Aside from historical studies, a brief representative sample of the wide range of Edwards scholarship in other fields, in addition to well-known biographies of Edwards by Perry Miller, Ola Winslow, and George Marsden, include: Patricia Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980) and Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005). More devotional biographies, mostly by evangelical authors include: Ian H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987) and John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *A God Enhanced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004). Philosophical works include: Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1966), Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), and Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's History of Philosophy: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Theological works include: Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Works of literary criticism include: William J. Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards: Theme, Motif, and Style* (College Station, TX: A&M University Press, 1975). In the field of biblical studies, see Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

When it comes to Edwards's apocalyptic thought, even if commentators have learned over the past half century not to overlook it, there is still a need for further understanding of its significance and meaning over time. Most scholars now acknowledge that Edwards delighted in preaching and reflecting upon apocalyptic themes.³⁹ Therefore, if we grant to Edwards scholarship a greater apocalyptic focus, it will certainly re-color the way we view his theology (e.g., Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology), as well as his approach to biblical studies (exegesis, hermeneutics), and even inform his interpretations of historical methodology, ethics, philosophy, epistemology and more. By situating Edwards's apocalyptic thought within the context of his life and writings I seek to draw a fuller picture of his religious and intellectual journey.

Due to its deep and comprehensively nuanced nature, Edwards's apocalyptic oeuvre does not lend itself to tidy categorization. But Stephen J. Stein offers a useful breakdown of three periods of Edwards's apocalyptic reflections: First, from the time of his schooling to 1733; second, the years of revivals, from 1734-1748; and third, the last decade of his life.⁴⁰ Stein concludes, however, that there is no progression of thought or linear development during these periods; rather, Edwards's views are "random,

³⁹ Sixty-six sermons on the Revelation have been identified so far. See Stephen J. Stein, editor's introduction to *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 5, Apocalyptic Writings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 15. Appendix B provides a list of titles and approximate dates, 441-444. Appendix D lists 34 headings of themes related to the Revelation in Edwards's "Miscellanies" notebooks. The "Blank Bible" notebook contains 22 annotations of Revelation, 462-464. Initial reference to Yale's *Works* will contain the full bibliographic information, subsequent notes with the abbreviation, *WJE*, followed by the volume and page number.

⁴⁰ Stephen J. Stein, "Eschatology," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 227.

occasional, and somewhat systematic, respectively.”⁴¹ Although I agree with Stein that there is no general progression of apocalyptic thought, I do argue that there is a development of apocalyptic emphases. Edwards’s early manuscripts of notes and sermons reveal his affinity for aesthetical categories like beauty, symmetry, proportion, and excellency.⁴² But the spiritual disappointments after the Northampton revival of 1734-35 created the conditions for Edwards to a greater reliance on utilizing apocalyptic themes to underscore his aesthetic formulations. This is not to claim any kind of overarching shift from the aesthetic to the apocalyptic, rather it seeks to examine the nuanced alterations to the patterns of his apocalyptic focus.

I will follow Stein in dividing Edwards’s apocalyptic reflection into three periods, although the breakdown of the timeframes will be different. The current chapter will cover the early period of his life, from his birth in 1703 to the formative event of the “little revival” of Northampton and the Connecticut River Valley, up to his preaching of

⁴¹ Ibid., 227. For discussion of a “development” theory of Edwards’s eschatological thought, the idea that it went through significant changes through the different periods of his life, see M. Darrol Bryant, “From Edwards to Hopkins: A Millennialist Critique of Political Culture,” in *The Coming Kingdom: Essays in American Millennialism and Eschatology*, ed. M. Darrol Bryant and Donald W. Dayton (New York: New Era Books, 1983), 49-50. See also M. Darrol Bryant, “America as God’s Kingdom,” in *Religion and Society*, ed. Jürgen Moltmann and Institute of Christian Thought (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 77-78. M. Darrol Bryant, “History and Eschatology in Jonathan Edwards: A Critique of the Heimart Thesis” (PhD diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 1976). For counterarguments, see Cheryl M. Peterson, “The Great Awakening as an ‘Outpouring of the Spirit’ in the Work of Redemption According to Jonathan Edwards: A New Interpretive Framework” *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, no. 1 (2014): 63. Also Kyoung-Chul Jang, “The Logic of Glorification: The Destiny of the Saints in the Eschatology of Jonathan Edwards” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, 1994), 101. While Bryant effectively deconstructs Alan Heimert’s excesses in seeing Edwards’s eschatology through a humanistic and progressive lens, I do not follow Bryant’s argument that it underwent a significant change—from postmillennialism to amillennialism—in his later years. For similar conclusions see Christopher R. Smith, “Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards” (PhD diss., Boston College, 1992).

⁴² Roland A. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards: An Essay in Aesthetics and Theological Ethics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 1.

the seminal sermon series on the work of redemption in 1739.⁴³ While Stein bundles the two period of revivals in his division, I find a significant development of Edwards's views on the apocalyptic meaning of revivalism after his preaching of this sermon series on redemption. Rich with apocalyptic themes, the sermons serve as a pivot to the period of Edwards from the Great Awakening to the "Great Dismissal" from his parish in Northampton. The shock of Edwards's removal from his Northampton congregation serves as another pivot to the final phase of his life, from his move to the Indian mission in Stockbridge to his brief presidency at Princeton. If there is any logic to this structure, it is with the hope that it highlights the overall consistency that Stein suggests in his tri-fold division, while also exploring the contours of Edwards's pivots in emphases over time in his overall eschatological program. For Edwards, there were two main sources of his eschatology—the preceding generations of colonial Puritans and the apocalyptic writings of the English divines.⁴⁴ In the following section, a brief history of Puritan apocalyptic thought will seek to contextualize Edwards's apocalyptic background and trace his rich eschatological heritage.

⁴³ The outbreak of conversions in Northampton and the surrounding towns in 1734-35 came to be referred to as the "little revival" to distinguish it from the revivals of the First Great Awakening in the early 1740s. Edwards wrote a report on the little revival that was published in 1737 as *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (London: John Oswald, 1737).

⁴⁴ See Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:54-74.

The Puritans and the Book of Revelation

English Apocalypticism

For many Protestants, the Reformation served as a defining moment for a new engagement with the contents of Revelation.⁴⁵ The magisterial reformers, namely Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564), continued to read Revelation as mostly symbolic and subsequently, the imagery of millennial bliss found in the twentieth chapter was interpreted allegorically. This was the position of the Catholic Church ever since Augustine declared that the idea of earthly rewards before the final resurrection is a gross speculation fit only for carnal men.⁴⁶ Augustine's interpretation held steadfast, ironically, for nearly one thousand years before it was seriously challenged by more radical groups of the Reformation who began to look afresh at the scriptures.⁴⁷ Luther was famously dubious in including Revelation in the canon until the historicist identification of the Antichrist with popery became useful in his propaganda against the Catholic Church.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Peter Toon, "Introduction," in *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600-1660*, ed. Peter Toon (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1970), 19. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: M. Secker and Warburg, 1957), 19-29. Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 13-14.

⁴⁶ Ernest Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 16. The fuller quote from Augustine provides greater context and clarity: "That it might be tolerable if they mentioned any spiritual delights which the saints might enjoy by Christ's presence; but since they affirm that they who then rise shall enjoy carnal and immoderate banquets of meat and drink without modesty, these things can only be believed by carnal men." Augustine was against the literalism of earthly rewards but especially against the excessive Epicurean descriptions employed. The overall point, however, is that Augustine is the most significant interpreter of the symbolic reading of Revelation until the time of the Reformation.

⁴⁷ The eschatological impact of radical groups of the Reformation, as well as Catholic forerunners, such as Joachim of Fiore, will be covered later in the chapter.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey K. Jue, "Puritan Millenarianism in Old and New England," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 261.

His change of heart was as much driven by a polemical agenda as it was a theological argument.⁴⁹ But Luther and Calvin still maintained an interpretive distance to Revelation. Part of the conservatism of Luther and Calvin stemmed from the destructive excesses of figures like Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525), best remembered for his role in the Peasants' Rebellion (1524-1525), and John of Leiden (1509-1536), the instigator of the Münster Rebellion (1534-1535), who used Revelation to gather followers to instigate revolution and revolt.⁵⁰ Their fanaticism and fantastic demise underscored the dangers of radical forms of apocalypticism. Another factor, not to be overlooked, was the difficulty of interpretation. As prolific as Calvin was as a biblical exegete he did not write a commentary on Revelation.⁵¹ An English divine noted wryly that Calvin, "had Expounded all the Books of the Scripture except the Revelation, which his not doing of, was an excellent commentary."⁵²

With Continental Europe reeling in the aftermath of the wars of religion brought upon by the Reformation, the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 reflected the beleaguered stalemate between Lutheranism and Catholicism. As the radical groups of the

⁴⁹ Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther, Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 64-74.

⁵⁰ Highly accessible studies of the Radical Reformation include George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Kirksville, MO: Truman University Press, 1992) and Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

⁵¹ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:3. While technically Calvin did not write on 2 and 3 John as well, Stein's point is that Calvin was overly cautious about expositing on the end times. See also Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955).

⁵² Thomas Philpot, *A Defense of the Illustrations*, preface to *A New Systeme of the Apocalypse* (London: n.p., 1688). Quoted in Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 40.

Reformation faced harsh repercussions, it was in England where a more dynamic apocalyptic tradition flourished. During the crucial period before the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559, a number of English biblical scholars carried the torch of the radical reformers, whose apocalyptic fervor had reached fever pitch in revolutionary and often violent ways. John Foxe (1516-1587) famously chronicled Catholic atrocities in his *Acts and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Dayes*, or better known as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. He cast Protestant martyrdom within the long-standing struggle of Christianity to maintain a "pure church" and the work added an apocalyptic dimension to the battle between Protestants and Catholics for the future of the English soul.⁵³ Beginning in the 1560s, nonconformist or dissenting factions within the Church of England began to be called "Puritans."⁵⁴ Like many labels that eventually become mainstream it was originally a derisive term. Although it has been difficult for historians to identify who exactly were or were not Puritans during this incipient era, what the various individuals had in common was a longing to further purify the Church of England or the "Church" in general and to continue the spirit of religious reformation through a Calvinist lens.⁵⁵

Some of the leading Puritan writers looked to expand upon Foxe's historicist approach to recasting church history and they turned to Revelation as both source and inspiration in interpreting their challenging times. Amongst the first generation of these

⁵³ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Dayes* (London: John Day, 1563).

⁵⁴ John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

⁵⁵ Coffey and Lim., introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 2-4.

figures, Thomas Brightman (1562-1607), a Presbyterian scholar who became a fellow at Cambridge in 1584, was perhaps the most influential.⁵⁶ He is often credited with being the first in a long line of scholars at the university to make a clean break with the magisterial reformers and the Augustinian tradition of millennial interpretation.⁵⁷ Deeply critical of the English church, Brightman's works were banned and only appeared in print after his death.⁵⁸ On top of a literal reading of a thousand-year reign of Christ, Brightman claimed special spiritual insights in his study, *A Revelation of the Apocalyps*.⁵⁹ A polemical work against the Roman Catholic Church, the book countered the claims of the influential Jesuit theologian, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), who taught his students at the University of Salamanca that most of the prophecies in Revelation had not yet taken place.⁶⁰ Ironically, Brightman made his case by appropriating the work of another Catholic author, the Franciscan medieval theologian Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202), who saw history in great epochs, each corresponding to a person of the Trinity. According to

⁵⁶ Theodore D. Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 198.

⁵⁷ Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 206. See also Peter Toon, "The Latter-day Glory," in *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 26.

⁵⁸ Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 198.

⁵⁹ Toon, "Latter-Day Glory," 27. Thomas Brightman, *A Revelation of the Apocalyps* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1611).

⁶⁰ Ibid. See also Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:4. Francisco Ribera, *In sacram Beati Ioannis Apostoli & Evangelistae Apocalypsin Commentari* (Lugduni, France: n.p., 1593). See also Wendell G. Johnson, ed., *End of Days: An Encyclopedia of the Apocalypse in World Religions* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 299.

Joachim, the age of the Father and Son had passed, the third and final stage was to be of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹

Utilizing the historical approach of Joachim, Brightman drew parallels of the seals, vials, and beasts in Revelation to past heresies of the Roman Church.⁶² What was particularly novel at the time was Brightman's reintroduction of an esoteric Joachimist idea of the Middle Advent.⁶³ He wrote that the first millennial period of the church, between Constantine and the Islamic invasions ended in 1300. They were now upon a second millennium, with the Reformation serving as the catalyst for a time when Christ's second advent, not bodily but spiritual, would advance the reign of the church and prepare the conditions for the final advent around the year 2300.⁶⁴ The period of the Middle Advent would be characterized by a revival of the church, marked by the destruction of both papal power and the Turks, which would eventually lead to the conversion of the Jews.⁶⁵ Brightman introduced a fresh (albeit not original) millenarian perspective to Puritan readers both in England and America, that is, of an earthly triumphant reign of Christ and the church before the Second Coming. However, Theodore Bozeman has been keen to point out that Brightman's influence was most

⁶¹ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:2.

⁶² Toon, "Latter-day Glory," 26.

⁶³ Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 207.

⁶⁴ Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550-1682* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2008), 43.

⁶⁵ Gerald McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 55.

likely minimal until the 1620s at the earliest, putting into question a common narrative that the Puritans who crossed the Atlantic to America were driven by a theological understanding of their special millennial role of an errand to establish Christ's earthly kingdom on the new continent.⁶⁶

After Brightman's death came further important apocalyptic studies. The year 1627 saw the publication of two major works on Revelation, Johann Heinrich Alsted's (1588-1638) *Diatribes de Milleannis Apocalypcis* and Joseph Mede's (1586-1639) *Clavis Apocalyptica*. Alsted was one of the preeminent German Calvinist theologians of his day and his work gave scholarly respectability to millenarian ideas on the Continent and in England.⁶⁷ In contrast to Brightman and following Francisco Ribera, Alsted saw the millennium as a future event.⁶⁸ His main contribution to Puritan millennial discourse, however, was in his hyper-literalism, making a break with the allegorical reading of Revelation by claiming that in the millennium there will be a literal bodily resurrection of the martyrs.⁶⁹ Joseph Mede, like Brightman, was a Cambridge scholar, but unlike his predecessor he was firmly entrenched in the Church of England and critical of the

⁶⁶ Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 209-212. Bozeman's timeline of Brightman's influence undermines studies that purport a "millennial" strain that follows continuously from Foxe to the New England Puritans. Strictly speaking, millenarianism was not a prominent feature of the first half-century of Puritanism. See also Reiner Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Theology in New England," *The New England Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 1990), 357-395.

⁶⁷ R.G. Clouse, "The Rebirth of Millenarianism," in *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 42.

⁶⁸ Reiner Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 3: Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 1998), 39.

⁶⁹ Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," 39.

separatists, although at times he wrote with certain Puritan leanings.⁷⁰ Mede was a classic Cambridge don and representative of why the university was so qualified to be at the forefront of a millenarian renaissance. By 1600 it had cultivated a coterie of competent Hebraists, some of whom would later work on the King James translation of the Old Testament.⁷¹ Concomitant with an emphasis on the original biblical languages was the university's eager embrace of the newest sciences.⁷²

As a polymath Mede fused scientific progress with philology to come to inventive conclusions about the end times.⁷³ His influential work, *The Key of the Revelation*, an English translation of his earlier Latin manuscript, *Clavis Apocalyptica*, paved the way for scholars and amateur biblical sleuths alike who sought after the hidden meanings in the book.⁷⁴ Like Alsted, Mede was a futurist and according to James Davidson, "Mede was instrumental in Protestants putting the millennium back in the future."⁷⁵ But Mede was especially astute in finding events in different chapters that matched one another in time, which he referred to as synchronisms.⁷⁶ This was Mede's own definition: "By a Synchronisme of prophecies I mean, when the things therein designed, run along in the

⁷⁰ Joel R. Beek and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 777.

⁷¹ Toon, "Latter-Day Glory," 23.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:5.

⁷⁴ Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation* (London: n.p., 1643). Mede's collected works were published posthumously as *Works of the Pious and Profoundly Learned Joseph Mede* (London: n.p., 1672).

⁷⁵ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 55.

⁷⁶ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:5.

same time; as if thou shouldest call it an agreement in time or age...”⁷⁷ For example, the figurative beast who gains power for forty-two months (Revelation 13:5) corresponds in time to the woman who hides in the wilderness for 1,260 days (Revelation 12:6).⁷⁸ Perhaps more than the content of Mede’s work, his methodology may have been of greater significance. For a subject matter long on speculation and short on methods, it was Mede’s efforts to systematize and utilize rigorous textual research that gave intellectual heft to apocalyptic thought.⁷⁹ Mede would go on to influence a whole generation of prophecy enthusiasts at Cambridge and beyond. Although neither Alsted nor Mede can be classified as Puritans, their eschatological works were influential not only to subsequent Puritan thinkers in England but especially to colonial Puritans.⁸⁰

An important disciple of Mede’s at Christ’s College in Cambridge was Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680). Goodwin was part of the assembly of divines gathered by Parliament in 1643 to codify the doctrines and liturgy of the Church of England, a group that eventually produced the Westminster Confession and both the Larger and Shorter Catechism.⁸¹ Jeffrey K. Jue observes that as a strongly self-identified Puritan, Goodwin serves as an important link between the traditionalist Mede and later mainstream

⁷⁷ Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, trans. Richard More (London: Philemon Stephens, 1650), i, 1.

⁷⁸ Clouse, “The Rebirth of Millenarianism,” 57.

⁷⁹ Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586-1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006). Mede consulted from a variety of sources including the early church fathers and rabbinic literature. I follow closely Jue’s discussion of Mede and Goodwin here. See also Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 47.

⁸⁰ Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 215. See also Clouse, “The Rebirth of Millenarianism,” 42.

⁸¹ Jue, “Puritan Millenarianism in Old and New England,” 265.

Puritans, including Edwards.⁸² Goodwin had earlier fled the persecution of the Puritans under archbishop William Laud (1573-1645). In Arnheim in the Netherlands he preached a series of sermons on Revelation.⁸³ Recalculating Mede's millennial timeline, Goodwin proffered 1650 or 1700 to be the possible dates of the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ.⁸⁴ There was always a tinge of millennial expectation and hope in Goodwin's apocalyptic mentors, but Goodwin put his stamp on an optimistic vision for the millennium when he declared, "this kingdom of Christ on earth to come is a far more glorious condition for the saints than what their souls have now in heaven; for these here overlook that condition which yet they were to run through, and their thoughts fly to this for comfort, 'We shall reign on earth.'"⁸⁵ For Goodwin, it seemed the millennial kingdom on earth was to be longed for more than heaven itself.

Mede also had an enormous impact on some of the leading thinkers of various disciplines. John Milton (1608-1674), who would leave an indelible mark in Puritan literature, was tutored by Mede at Christ's College.⁸⁶ A generation later, the best known scientist of his era, Isaac Newton (1643-1727), would make end-times speculation a respectable hobby by employing his scientific mind to the task of unlocking the mysteries

⁸² Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth*, 179.

⁸³ Ibid, 178. See also Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 45.

⁸⁴ Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth*, 179.

⁸⁵ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh, UK: J. Nichol, 1861), iii, 15.

⁸⁶ For the role of eschatology in Milton's works see David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and his Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Juliet Cummins, ed., *Milton and the Ends of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

of the Apocalypse.⁸⁷ In his *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*, published posthumously in 1733, Newton noted the unity between the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and saw in their fulfillment the providence of God's working in history.⁸⁸ Beyond Cambridge, Mede's work was the sounding board for subsequent commentators on Revelation, including the liberal Arminian theologian Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) and the dissenting minister, Moses Lowman (1680-1752). Both were influential for Edwards. Moses Lowman was in fact the author Edwards's referenced the most in his own study of Revelation.⁸⁹

Colonial Apocalypticism

Although Jonathan Edwards was thoroughly knowledgeable of the major works of eschatology across the Atlantic, the most immediate background of his apocalyptic thought was his colonial Puritan heritage. Many Puritans became intensely eschatologically-minded during the religious and political scrutiny of Archbishop William Laud. The first generation Puritans of the Great Migration carried this interest with them to the New World, where the sense of fulfilling "an errand into the wilderness" supplied optimistic fuel to millennial thought.⁹⁰ A figure who is representative of the first

⁸⁷ Sarah Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," in *The Books of Nature and Scripture: Recent Essays on Natural Philosophy, Theology, and Biblical Criticism in the Netherlands of Spinoza's Time and the British Isles in Newton's Time*, ed. James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 40.

⁸⁸ William Whitla, *Sir Isaac Newton's Daniel and the Apocalypse* (London: John Murray, 1922), 308. Newton's apocalyptic work is printed in this edition.

⁸⁹ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:55.

⁹⁰ Notwithstanding Theodore Bozeman's revisionism of both the timing and degree of millennial fervor, following Perry Miller, scholars advancing the idea of heightened millennial expectation as a

generation of Puritans on American soil is John Cotton (1585-1652), a non-conformist minister from Lincolnshire, England who became a leading clergyman of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. A contemporary of Joseph Mede at Cambridge, Cotton studied at Trinity College before moving to Emmanuel College, the most Puritan of the university's colleges. Having adopted the congregational principles of church polity, Cotton became one of the main architects of establishing congregationalism as New England's dominant ecclesiastical model.⁹¹

Cotton was an influential figure who established an eschatological agenda for New England. He taught a Thursday sermon-lecture series from Revelation in 1639–41 at the First Church of Boston, which were later printed back in England as three separate books.⁹² In *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation*, Cotton expounded upon the anti-Catholic position of the Puritans by identifying the first beast in chapter 13 of Revelation to be the Roman Catholic Church and the second beast, the office of the papacy.⁹³ Profoundly influenced by the turbulent political situation in

motivating factor in the migration of New World Puritans are many: J.A. de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions, 1640-1810* (Kampen, Netherlands: J.H. Kok N.V., 1970), 29-30. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 57. Emory Elliot, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 186-190. Mason Lowance Jr., *The Language of Canaan: Metaphor and Symbol in New England from the Puritans to the Transcendentalists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 115-159. Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.

⁹¹ Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 115-121.

⁹² Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 231.

⁹³ Toon, "Latter-Day Glory," 34. Beek and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 780. See John Cotton, *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation* (London: Tim Smart, 1655).

England during the years of the English Civil War, Cotton instilled millennial concerns in his congregation by preaching prophetically, proclaiming that while he was neither a “Prophet nor a Son of a Prophet to foretell things to come” nonetheless perhaps as early as 1655 “the beast” and “the head of the beast” will suffer such as blow as to make obvious the fulfilling of prophecy.⁹⁴ Not only was Cotton critical of the Catholic Church, in *The Churches Resurrection, or the Opening of the Fift and Sixt Verses of the 20th Chap. Of the Revelation*, he criticized the Church of England as being hardly distinguishable from Popery.⁹⁵ It was imperative then for New England to lead the way in reforming the church.⁹⁶ Undoubtedly, Cotton’s strong ecclesiology, with its emphasis on restricting membership to the saved, was strongly influenced by his millennial belief that the New England churches must remain pure in order to participate in the millennium.⁹⁷

Through Cotton’s sermons and writings, he was cultivating in New England the language and habits of apocalyptic thought. Cotton preached his Thursday sermons at around the same time his contemporary Thomas Goodwin preached on Revelation in the Netherlands.⁹⁸ Although the content of both preachers was similar for they both relied

⁹⁴ The decade-long English Civil Wars of the 1640s took on significant eschatological dimensions, especially as the more radically apocalyptic nonconformist groups like the Fifth Monarchy men sought political control based on millennial expectations. See Maclear, “New England and the Fifth Monarchy,” 248-249. Cotton, *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation*, 93.

⁹⁵ John Cotton, *The Churches Resurrection, or the Opening of the Fift and Sixt Verses of the 20th Chap. Of the Revelation* (London: n.p., 1642), 19.

⁹⁶ Maclear, “New England and the Fifth Monarchy,” 233-234.

⁹⁷ Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” 43.

⁹⁸ Maclear, “New England and the Fifth Monarchy,” 232. See also Beek and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 781. Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth*, 178.

heavily on Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede, the context and setting differed greatly. While Goodwin was preaching to an exiled Puritan congregation in the Old Continent, Cotton was setting the tone for an apocalyptic relationship between the New World colonists and their home country. Following traditional Puritan patterns of preaching Cotton's sermons read like lecture-style disputations, with numbered commentary on a verse, along with anticipated questions followed by reasoned answers. In *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation*, Cotton asked rhetorically: "Will you be gone back to Egypt?" before qualifying it with a parenthetical—"God forbid I should count all our Native Country as Egypt."⁹⁹ Yet, the National Church of England was likened to the image of the beast, with characteristics of a lion, a leopard, or a bear.¹⁰⁰ He then raised a prospective question:

Q: But you will say, what is this to me, I am but a private Christian?

Ans: Private Christians must not live always in a private State, for that darkens a mans estate, if he knows not the order of Gods house, nor addresseth himselfe to it.¹⁰¹

This is a compelling passage that highlights the tensions colonists felt regarding their political loyalties, as well as to their rightful duties and obligations as citizens of a new land.¹⁰² It is interesting that Cotton, as a leading clergyman of the colony, had to contend with the issue of private/public spiritual rights years earlier when several of his

⁹⁹ Cotton, *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰² Beek and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 780.

parishioners, Anne Hutchinson the most well-known among them, ignited the imbroglio of the antinomian controversy.¹⁰³ Cotton's millennial ecclesiology was not as radical as the staunch separatist and nemesis, Roger Williams (1603-1683), who rejected any association with the Anglican church, or the apocalyptic Fifth Monarchy men in England, who worked to overthrow the reign of Charles I (1600-1649).¹⁰⁴ But Cotton's eschatology was far more than localized matters. In *The Pwring Out of the Seven Vials*, Cotton spoke anticipated the familiar New England jeremiads of the second generation:

for believe it, you will finde this true, and remember it while you live, if you bee corrupt in *New-England*, if you be worldly minded here, false of your words and promises here, injurious in your dealings here, believe it one of the two will unavoidably follow, either all *England* will judge your Reformation but a delusion, and an invention of some of your Magistrates, or Elders, or otherwise looke at you, as not sincere but counterfeit. This unavoidably you will finde true, you cannot poure forth a Viall of more wrath on Religion...¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Anne Hutchinson was put on trial and banned from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for her refusal to stop criticizing clergymen and to cease holding meetings of religious instruction. But at the crux of her banishment was her openness as a woman to declare she was speaking directly through divine revelations from the spirit. For trial sources, see *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, ed. David D. Hall (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), originally published in 1968. See also Ann Fairfax Withington and Jack Schwartz, "The Political Trial of Anne Hutchinson," *The New England Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (June 1978): 226-240.

¹⁰⁴ Jimmy D. Neff, "Roger Williams: Pious Puritan and Strict Separationist," *Journal of Church and State* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 533-534. For the rift between John Cotton and Roger Williams, see Jesper Rosenmeier, "The Teacher and the Witness: John Cotton and Roger Williams," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1968): 411-431. For the millenarianism of Roger Williams, see W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). For Fifth Monarchy Men, see Bernard S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

¹⁰⁵ John Cotton, *The Pwring Out of the Seven Vials: or an Exposition of the 16, Chapter of the Revelation, with an Application of It to Our Times* (London: R.S., 1642), 23. The established pattern of prophetic lament (ala the weeping prophet Jeremiah), the preaching and warning of spiritual declension, and the elevation of the faith of the founding generation came to be recognized as the New England jeremiad.

In the above passage, Cotton framed the responsibilities of New England citizens within the structures of an eschatological outlook. The estate or State, of both individual and communal, spiritual and temporal, was to be taken seriously, lest they “fall into the mouth of a Lyon or come under paw a Beare.”¹⁰⁶

As a disciple of Thomas Brightman, Cotton’s preconditions before the end of the world were very much in line with his teacher and mentor. Cotton believed that the “first resurrection” would occur at the beginning of the millennium, signaling not a literal resurrection, but a revival of faith after the demise of the papacy, including the conversion of the Jews to Christ. The “second resurrection” would occur at the end of the millennium, a literal resurrection before the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgement.¹⁰⁷ His allegorical understanding of the resurrection of the saints before the millennium was that it would be a time of a gradualist spiritual advancement of religion.¹⁰⁸ What we have here—the theories of the destruction of the papacy, increase of general holiness through the means of grace brought upon by teaching and preaching, and the conversion of the Jews—are recognizable ingredients of a later iteration of postmillennialism, an eschatological line that would become more closely associated with Jonathan Edwards and his disciples.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Cotton, *The Pwring Out of the Seven Vials*, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Beek and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 780-781. See also Toon, “Latter-Day Glory,” 36.

¹⁰⁸ Cotton, *The Churches Resurrection*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” 39. Most commentators of Revelation believed the conversion of the Jews must occur before the coming of the millennium. The significance of Jewish conversion will be covered in greater depth in the works of Increase and Cotton Mather.

The political ambiguities of John Cotton's millennial ecclesiology were applied with greater focus by Cotton's disciple, John Eliot (1604-1690), notable "Apostle to the Indians," a missionary, preacher and teacher in Roxbury, Massachusetts. In the original charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony the principle aim of the plantation was to convert the native population and though its seal even displayed an Indian imploring the colonists to "Come here and help us," there was no organized Indian outreach before Eliot.¹¹⁰ Above and beyond painstakingly studying Algonquin and producing the first translated Bible in the language, Eliot used his gift of organization toward creating communities of Indian praying towns. Furthermore, he utilized his penchant for promotion by propagating the image of the pious praying Indian.¹¹¹ Through his experience of setting up communal spaces of faith for his Indian towns, Eliot took Cotton's ecclesiastical millenarianism to its extremes by implementing a system of governance based on the biblical model of Moses and his father-in-law Jethro in Exodus 18.¹¹² This utopian experiment held millenarian implications for Eliot. In the preface to *The Christian Commonwealth or The Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ*, a work based on his Indian community in the town of Natick, Eliot wrote: "Much is spoken of the rightful Heir of the Crown of England, and the injustice of casting out the

¹¹⁰ James Holstun, "John Eliot's Empirical Millenarianism," *Representations* 4 (Autumn 1983): 131.

¹¹¹ Holstun, "John Eliot's Empirical Millenarianism, 131.

¹¹² Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 254. Exodus 18:21 tells the story of Jethro advising Moses to appoint rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

right Heir: but Christ is the only right Heir of the Crown of England.”¹¹³ Eliot most likely wrote this tract around 1651 at the height of millennial expectation in Cromwell’s Puritan rule in England.¹¹⁴ But by the time it was published in 1659 fortunes had rapidly changed and by 1661, after the restoration of the English monarchy, the Massachusetts General Court banned the publication and Eliot was forced to give a recantation.¹¹⁵

For Eliot, the establishment of a biblical model of government in the New World was preparatory, a prelude to an imminent millennial age.¹¹⁶ He hoped that it would set in motion a cascade of millennial events beginning with England’s adoption of a similar program in lieu of a human-centered monarchy.¹¹⁷ Even the conversion of the Indians was not an individualistic concern for the unsaved soul *per se*, but another stage in the rehearsal of a future millennial pattern.¹¹⁸ The restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660 and King Philip’s War in 1675, which disrupted his Indians missions, were two seminal events that affected Eliot’s millennial outlook.¹¹⁹ No longer was he focused on systemic changes in England’s monarchy or fixated on an imminent millennial reign of

¹¹³ John Eliot, *The Christian Commonwealth or The Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ* (London: Livewell Chapman, 1659), vi.

¹¹⁴ Maclear, “New England and the Fifth Monarchy,” 254.

¹¹⁵ Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 265.

¹¹⁶ Richard W. Cogley, “John Eliot and the Millennium,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 230-231.

¹¹⁷ Cogley, “John Eliot and the Millennium,” 232-233.

¹¹⁸ Holstun, “John Eliot’s Empirical Millennarianism,” 142.

¹¹⁹ Cogley, “John Eliot and the Millennium,” 235-241. King Philip’s War pitted the colonists against the Wampanoag Indians led by their chief, King Philip. Either through death or desertion, the war cost Eliot a significant number of his approximately 1,100 Indian Christian converts.

Christ on earth. Although Eliot's Indian commonwealth was largely seen by his contemporaries as a failure in radical missional experimentation, his fusing of political ideology (theocratic structure), ecclesiology, current events, history, missions, conversion, and utopian idealism under the rubric of latter-day expectations had lasting effects in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.¹²⁰

The intricacies, subtexts, and transitions of New England Puritan eschatology can be further gleaned from a survey of the three generations of Mathers. Taken together they were the most instrumental in creating a Puritan legacy in colonial New England. Richard Mather (1596-1669) was the first-generation patriarch. As the author of the Cambridge Platform, a document defending and detailing congregational polity, Richard, along with John Cotton, became a leading architect in establishing New England congregationalism as the region's dominant model of ecclesiology.¹²¹ One of the founders of the "New England Way," Richard shared with his generation's intellectual leaders an eschatological sense of history.¹²² While he was not as explicit as his contemporary, John Cotton, in promoting to his congregation an end-times worldview, Richard Mather

¹²⁰ Eliot's millennial thinking is richly complex and extends far beyond what a paragraph summary can offer. In his article, Richard Cogley sees a three-stage development of John Eliot's millennialism. For further discussion, see James Holstun, *A Rational Millennium: Puritan Utopias of Seventeenth-Century England and America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). See also Timothy J. Sehr, "John Eliot, Millennialist and Missionary," *The Historian* 46, no. 2 (February 1984): 187-203.

¹²¹ Richard Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1979), 9.

¹²² Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 97, 372n25. The "New England Way" often refers to the Congregational ecclesiology of John Cotton and Richard Mather as well as to the socio-religious civil polities of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

nonetheless became the progenitor of New England's most renowned eschatological family.

Born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Increase Mather (1639-1723) is considered one of the most prominent of the New World-born-and-bred Puritans. As the son of Richard Mather the course of Increase's life through Harvard and the ministry seemed inevitable. In Increase's final year at Harvard and not long after his mother's parting words hoping he would become a minister, he began to take the matter of his conversion to heart.¹²³ Fittingly, it was on election day in 1655 that Increase finally felt the assurance of his election unto God.¹²⁴ After attaining an M.A. at Trinity College in Dublin he returned to Boston where he ministered in various pulpits until in 1664 he became settled at the Second Church in Boston, a position that placed him front and center of religious, political, cultural, and intellectual influence in New England.¹²⁵ Much of his life and ministry was devoted to maintaining the standard of faith of the first-generation Puritan fathers. The New England jeremiad, the second generation's reckoning of religious declension both real and imagined, became a staple of colonial pulpits and Increase Mather often preached about the failure of the second generation to live up to the spiritual covenant of the original settlers.¹²⁶ As an influential member of Boston's Standing Order,

¹²³ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 83. Biographical content of the Mathers is heavily indebted to Middlekauff's work.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 85-87. Increase Mather was sent to England to negotiate a new charter for Massachusetts Bay, which he successfully obtained in 1692. From 1685-1701 he held the position as either the president or head (various titles with the equivalency of the presidency) of Harvard College.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 96-112. Middlekauff argues that in general there is little evidence of any significant religious declension between the two generations. See also Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the*

Increase was deeply invested in the thorny theological and ecclesiastical issues of the day. When the matter of the Half-Way Covenant became a subject of intense debate, Increase revealed his independent spirit when he departed from the affirmative stance of his illustrious father.¹²⁷ Increase would later change his mind and become instead a staunch defender of the practice.¹²⁸

It was in the arena of eschatology, however, where Increase Mather truly transformed himself, not necessarily in what he believed, but in the intensity of his evolving thoughts on the end times.¹²⁹ He was particularly interested in the issue of Jewish conversion. For the Puritan settlers of New England, the expectation that a national conversion of the Jews would be a harbinger of the millennium became a viable eschatological position, no less endorsed by the eminent Puritan English divine, William Perkins (1558-1602).¹³⁰ It was often equated with the pouring of the sixth vial in Revelation 16.¹³¹ In *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*, published in 1669, Mather followed Joseph Mede and Thomas Brightman in anticipating a literal fulfillment of St. Paul's enigmatic pronouncements regarding the Jews in Romans 11. What exactly was

American Self, 97. Bercovitch cites a number of historians that concur with this view: Edmund Morgan, David Levin, Robert Pope, David Hall, Emory Elliott among others.

¹²⁷ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 85-86. The controversy of the Half-Way Covenant will be covered in greater detail later in the section on Solomon Stoddard.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 179.

¹³⁰ Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 229. For the Puritan colonists William Perkins was one of the most widely read and influential theologians.

¹³¹ Alan Heimert and Andrew Delbanco, ed., introduction to *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 9.

meant by “all Israel will be saved?” Mather clarified in his treatise: “Others think that by *all Israel*, is meant the body of the Israelitish Nation. And that seemeth to be the genuine interpretation of the words.”¹³² By this Increase meant that a general fullness or a great number of the physical Israelite nation would be saved from their spiritual bondage.¹³³ But even before that can be accomplished, wrote Mather, a worldwide battle would have to take place: “Before this salvation is over, the great battel of *Armageddon* must be fought, which will be the most terrible day of battel that ever was.”¹³⁴ The forces of the Turks and the Pope would combine to attack the kingdom of Christ composed of Jewish and Gentile believers—a total war between the followers of the Lamb against the followers of the beast, the worshippers of Christ versus the worshippers of the Antichrist.¹³⁵

Increase Mather wrote the treatise in response to historical events in the Old World that were reigniting Puritan millennial hopes for the Jewish people. In the 1650s the Amsterdam rabbi Manasseh ben Israel prepared a group of Jews for readmission to Cromwellian England (Jews were officially banished in 1290 by order of Edward I) as a precursor to fulfilling the messianic prophecy of Deuteronomy 28:64.¹³⁶ Although

¹³² Increase Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation* (London: John Allen, 1669), 9.

¹³³ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*, 9-10.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹³⁶ Richard W. Cogley, “The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the “Judeo-Centric” Strand of Puritan Millenarianism,” *Church History* 72, no. 2 (June 2003): 326. See also Maclear, “New England and the Fifth Monarchy,” 244. Deuteronomy 28:64 is a prophecy regarding the scattering of the Jewish people.

Cromwell opened the door to greater Jewish toleration in 1656, the endeavor would eventually prove to be unsuccessful.¹³⁷ Nevertheless it stirred up the imaginations of millennial watchmen on both sides of the Atlantic. Nearly a decade later, Shabb'tai Zvi, claiming to be the Messiah, gathered European and Turkish Jews to reclaim Palestinian land from the Ottomans.¹³⁸ For many Puritans the timing seemed to coincide perfectly with predictions of 1666 as the beginning of the latter days.¹³⁹ This, too, ended in disappointment, as news reached both Old and New England shores that Shabb'tai Zvi, far from ushering a restored messianic kingdom for the Jews, had instead apostatized under the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁰

Despite countless letdowns over thirty years of teaching and preaching, Increase Mather never wavered from his convictions that the events leading up to the end-of-days were in motion. In the late 1690s, Increase revisited his earlier chiliastic essay with his *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation*, this time prompted by the news of Ottoman defeats.¹⁴¹ In it, he rejected the metaphorical reading of Israel's salvation by the prominent English Puritan minister, Richard Baxter (1619-1691), and affirmed his long-held beliefs on the sequential timing of Christ's Second Coming, which consisted of a literal thousand-year reign of the saints on earth, judgment, and then the

¹³⁷ Heimert and Delbanco, introduction to *The Puritans in America*, 9.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 326. See also Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus," 365.

¹³⁹ Heimert and Delbanco, introduction to *The Puritans in America*, 326.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

final resurrection.¹⁴² By the end of his life, Mather continued to espouse an imminent return of Christ, exemplified in a published sermon, *A Dissertation Wherein the Strange Doctrine*, where Mather wrote: “We may safely upon clear Scripture grounds affirm, that the Morning of the Great Day of Judgment is Near, but for any to fix on the Particular year, when that Day shall begin, is too much Boldness and Presumption.”¹⁴³ Increase Mather’s ordering of millennial events serves as a transition from John Cotton’s proto-postmillennial positions to Cotton Mather’s proto-premillennial theories. This wide range of millennial ideas would inform Jonathan Edwards as he developed his own millennial focus.

Cotton Mather (1663-1728) has an origin story proportional to his impact on late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century New England. His grandfather, Richard Mather, took as his wife the widow of John Cotton, whose daughter was Maria Cotton. In what may have been America’s first great merger, Increase Mather married his step-sister, Maria, thus uniting by blood the two most prominent families of New England. Cotton Mather was the product of this union.¹⁴⁴ After Harvard, Cotton Mather was ordained in 1685 and served as his father’s assistant at Boston’s Second Church (North Church).¹⁴⁵ Even more than his father or grandfathers, Cotton Mather was deeply

¹⁴² Increase Mather, *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation* (London: Nath. Hillier, 1709).

¹⁴³ Increase Mather, *A Dissertation Wherein the Strange Doctrine Lately Published in a Sermon* (Boston: B. Green, 1708), 131.

¹⁴⁴ Lovelace, *Pietism of Cotton Mather*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

invested in all things apocalyptic. He was a leading figure of a group of end-times enthusiasts who held meetings to discuss and debate the minutiae of apocalyptic theories.¹⁴⁶ Over his lifetime Mather wrote profusely but his literary output cannot be properly understood apart from his apocalyptic worldview. As Robert Middlekauff writes, “on a deeper level Mather’s eschatology provided a coherence to all his thinking about man’s relationship to God.”¹⁴⁷ While Increase Mather still maintained a level of humility and conservatism regarding the precise times and dates of the last things, his son would not be as cautious. In 1691 Cotton Mather published his first sermon on the end times, *Things To Be Look’d For*, where he summoned a call to be watchful for events far and wide as they would signal the return of Christ; next year in *A Midnight Cry* he even put a date to his speculation, an approach his father warned against and was loathed to do.¹⁴⁸ For most of his life, however, Cotton Mather’s eschatology did not veer far from his father’s.¹⁴⁹

Out of the countless manuscripts through which Mather crafted his eschatological reflections, three of his unpublished works, “Problema Theologicum,” “Triparadisus,”

¹⁴⁶ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 15.

¹⁴⁷ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 324.

¹⁴⁸ Cotton Mather, *Things to be Look’d for: discourses on the glorious characters, with conjectures on the speedy approaches of that state...* (Cambridge, MA: Samuel Green, 1691); *A Midnight Cry an essay for our awakening out of that sinful sleep...* (Boston: John Allen, 1692). See also Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 13.

¹⁴⁹ Reiner Smolinski, introduction to “The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of ‘Triparadisus,’” *Electronic Texts in American Studies* 48. ed., Reiner Smolinski (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 5, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/48>.

and “Biblia Americana,” reveal the revisions and shifts of emphases over time.¹⁵⁰ In the “Problema Theologicum,” completed in 1703, Mather largely reiterated the positions of his father and Joseph Mede in delineating a proto-premillennialist orientation. For instance, Cotton Mather wrote: “The Position, (or, if that may seem too imposing a Word, I will more Softly call it only. My Perswasion,) which I would humbly offer, is This; That the Second Coming of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, will be at the Beginning of the Happy State, which, according to his Word, we Expect for his Church, upon Earth, in the Latter Dayes.”¹⁵¹ As if anticipating the overwrought arguments of the nineteenth century whether Jesus’ return will occur at the beginning or end of the millennium, Mather posited his rather tenuous stance on it.

Mather, who was known for his strenuous positions on religious matters, was in fact surprisingly flexible when it came to his apocalyptic thought. After several misses with millennial dates he proposed 1736 to be the special prophetic year of awaiting. But after reading the calculations put forth by Isaac Newton’s mathematical protégé and fellow end-times enthusiast, William Whiston (1667-1752), he revised it to 1716.¹⁵² When that year passed uneventfully Mather began to question his assumptions regarding the literal restoration of the nation of Israel as a precondition for the Second Coming.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. See also Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 14.

¹⁵¹ Cotton Mather, “Problema Theologicum: An Authoritative Edition,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 104, part 2, ed. Jeffrey S. Mares (October 1994): 368, <https://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517835.pdf>.

¹⁵² Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 342. Smolinski, introduction to “The Threefold Paradise,” 65.

¹⁵³ Smolinski, introduction to “The Threefold Paradise,” 27.

He had tried in vain to convert the Jews through his writings and even personal evangelism, but save perhaps one anecdotal conversion, the Jewish people as a whole seemed no closer to national salvation.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, he wondered if the entire nation was in the process of salvation, how then could Christ come as a thief in the night? He could not reconcile the position of his father that the literal conversion of the Jews would precede the millennium with his personal conviction that the latter days would soon be approaching. The data just did not correspond with his preferred eschatological timeline.

In the 1720s, Mather wrote in his diary that after he had wrestled with these lingering doubts he had a spiritual breakthrough that changed his mind from a literalist reading of the conversion of the Jews to a metaphorist interpretation.¹⁵⁵ His metaphorical turn was significant for a number of reasons. First, for most of his life Mather had written to defend against the allegorist hermeneutics of biblical exegetes like Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), John Lightfoot (1602-1675), Henry Hammond (1605-1660) and Richard Baxter (1615-1691).¹⁵⁶ Mather understood the theological implications of turning his back on the literalist hermeneutical tradition of his father and grandfathers but he revealed his openness for adaptation. Second, in turning from a futurist position regarding the conversion of Israel to a preterist one, that is, that the prophecy was already fulfilled through the establishment of the first-century Jewish and Gentile church, Mather may have opened the door for future generations to make a closer association of New England

¹⁵⁴ Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus," 384-385.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 386-387.

¹⁵⁶ Smolinski, introduction to "The Threefold Paradise," 21-37.

with the New Israel, or even America as the seat of the New Jerusalem.¹⁵⁷ Third, Mather's revocation of his futurist stance seems to have been largely motivated by his unshakeable belief in the immanence of a series of spectacular, spiritual, and supernatural events, including cataclysmic convulsions of the earth, a great conflagration, the rapture, and the establishment of a physical New Jerusalem on earth.¹⁵⁸ In "Triparadisus" Mather wrote:

We NOW come to This; We know nothing that must necessarily praecede and putt off the DAY of GOD, or hinder, but that it MAY Come Immediately; And, For aught we know, the Day that shall burn like an Oven MAY come on before to Morrow Morning; and before the Reader of this Book has laid it out of his hand, the Flames MAY begin, that will carry all before them...What I am now coming to demonstrate, is, That the Second Coming of the LORD, and so the tremendous Conflagration which is to make Way for the New Heavens and the New Earth wherein shall dwell Righteous-ness, will be at and for the Destruction of the Romish Antichrist, which appears to be Now the Next Thing, and Quickly, to be look'd for.¹⁵⁹

For the aging Mather it no longer made sense to wait patiently for the conversion of the Jews when it was merely a hindrance to God's plan of expedient redemption and

¹⁵⁷ A number of scholars have challenged the commonly-held associations of colonial New Englanders with the New Israel and with New England being the New Jerusalem, including Theodore Bozeman, Reiner Smolinski, Jeffrey Jue, and Richard Cogley. Smolinski makes the argument that past scholars may have overemphasized Puritan typology and overlooked Puritan doctrine and theology. The embrace of a future literal restoration of national Israel by leading New England Puritan divines precludes a successionist view of the Church or Gentile people groups. The significance, then, of Cotton Mather's preterist turn will be discussed further.

¹⁵⁸ Smolinski, introduction to "The Threefold Paradise," 38-59. The event of the rapture of the Saints or the church would become one of the defining features of premillennialism. The biblical reference is derived primarily from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, where at the Second Coming of Jesus the dead and living will meet him in the air. The traditional interpretation of the passage is that Christians or the church would be raptured to the heavenly realms so as to be spared from the impending judgment of Christ's Second Coming.

¹⁵⁹ Cotton Mather, "The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of 'Triparadisus,'" 328.

restoration. He would rather hold on to the immanence of a future rapture than to a literalist view of Romans 11. He reveled in the demise of the Turks and saw the fall of Popish powers and the Antichrist as being right around the corner. Throughout his life Mather pushed the boundaries of interpreting contemporary events as the unfolding of God's prophetic providence and it was up to astute spiritual observers like him to deliver the correct interpretation.¹⁶⁰ From his diary and manuscripts it seems his confidence stemmed from an indomitable spirit that reveled in an inexhaustible discipline of fasting, prayer, and supplication, which he claims bore fruit in God revealing things to him personally.¹⁶¹ Thus he never gave up hope. Even through multiple disappointments, till the day he died he expected Christ's coming to happen in his lifetime.¹⁶²

In many ways Cotton Mather compares favorably with Edwards—they were both precocious child prodigies from distinguished Puritan stock, they were prolific authors, they casted a wide net of influence within their generation, and their affinity for eschatology went far beyond mere religious curiosity; it was integral to their entire belief systems. Their reputations, however, are markedly different. While Mather's range from mostly negative to subdued respect, Edwards has a status of a near saint.¹⁶³ To a certain

¹⁶⁰ John Stuart Erwin, *The Millennialism of Cotton Mather: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 7-8.

¹⁶¹ Erwin, *The Millennialism of Cotton Mather*, 7-8.

¹⁶² Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 16.

¹⁶³ For an interesting analysis on the differing reputations of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards see David Levin, "Edwards, Franklin, and Cotton Mather: A Meditation on Character and Reputation," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 34-49.

extent this stark dichotomy has been filtered down to their apocalyptic thought as Mather's premillennialism and Edward's postmillennialism have been represented as two major divergent streams of colonial Puritan eschatology. But as many historians have argued, Edwards's postmillennialism has been generally overstated and was certainly not a point of a new departure in eschatology. A stronger case can be made that Mather's premillennialism was more of a foundational premise for his eschatology, as he was willing to sacrifice a hermeneutical interpretation he had held earlier in order to satisfy his search for premillennial consistency.¹⁶⁴

A comparison of Mather and Edwards reveals more intersections between their apocalyptic thought than not. One example of their convergence is Stephen Stein's analysis of their interpretations regarding the Antichrist.¹⁶⁵ Arguing against Alan Heimert's thesis that the Great Awakening produced profound changes in evangelical attitudes regarding the Catholic Church and the Antichrist, Stein uses Mather's and Edwards's views on an English work regarding the number 666 as a case study to undermine the notion that such grand paradigm shifts took place between their respective generations.¹⁶⁶ What Stein concludes is that both Mather and Edwards were well-versed

¹⁶⁴ Jeffrey Scott Mares, editor's introduction to "Cotton Mather's 'Problema Theologicum': An Authoritative Edition," 342.

¹⁶⁵ Stephen J. Stein, "Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards on the Number of the Beast: Eighteenth-Century Speculation about the Antichrist," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 84 (October 1974): 293-315, <https://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44498079.pdf>. Stein examines Mather and Edwards's writings regarding a work by Francis Potter (1594-1648), an English clergyman who wrote a popular treatise on the number of the beast. See Francis Potter, *An Interpretation of the Number 666: Wherein, not onely the Manner, how this Number ought to be Interpreted, is clearely proved and Demonstrated...* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1642).

¹⁶⁶ Stein, "Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards on the Number of the Beast," 303-304.

in the same eschatological sources and that they fall in line within the traditional stream of Puritan eschatology. Similarly, I find there is a continuity in apocalyptic focus that runs through the First and Second Great Awakenings, mainly through the historical-redemptive apocalypticism of Edwards, which, despite its obvious divergences, has much overlap with Mather's activist outreach to various unconverted people groups and with later iterations of nineteenth-century revivalism.

What we have seen through even a cursory overview of Puritan eschatology is the overlapping streams of ideas that created the conditions for a rich cultural heritage of apocalyptic concerns. The dizzying range of apocalyptic topics covered and argued over by religious leaders deeply invested in such matters precluded a standard Puritan eschatological stance from emerging in the eighteenth century. Many of these disparate themes were inextricably intertwined in the life experiences of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards's lifelong pursuit was to digest these eschatological traditions in order to come to a coherent understanding of such things. His apocalyptic thought, which we will now turn to, reflects the complexities of the various Puritan eschatological threads, at times converging with or diverging against traditional patterns, at times running parallel with them, constantly in dialogue with the past, present, and future of both scholarly and biblical interpretations.

Jonathan Edwards's Apocalyptic Foundations, 1703-1726

Jonathan Edwards was born to the Reverend Timothy Edwards (1669-1758) and his wife, Esther, in October of 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut. Jonathan had four older sisters and six younger sisters.¹⁶⁷ As the only boy in the family Edwards was surrounded by female influences but Ola Winslow's early biography refutes any notion that his childhood was in any way dominated by them as he had many male cousins his age living nearby.¹⁶⁸ The family was devoutly Puritan and one of the more well-established clans in New England. Edwards's grandfather was Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), pastor of the church in Northampton and an influential figure in New England congregationalism, especially in the ecclesiastical affairs of the western parts of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.¹⁶⁹ Like Cotton Mather, Edwards was a precociously pious child. Edwards recalled that as a nine-year-old he prayed five times a day, spoke to other boys about religion, and organized prayer meetings.¹⁷⁰ In one sense Edwards's childhood was not atypical of a fourth-generation Puritan of privileged religious upbringing, with its attendant high standards in education and a probable path to the clergy in the future. However, the time and place of his birth proved especially fortuitous for a Puritan of his intelligence and religious temperament to make an outsized impact upon the world.

¹⁶⁷ Much of the biographical sketch of Edwards's life is derived from Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1940) and George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁸ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 34.

¹⁶⁹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 11.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

Edwards was born at the beginning of the eighteenth century when the colonies were in a time of important transition. After several generations New England enjoyed a measure of stability and even the frontiers had a settled character. But they were still not without threats from within and without. First, there was constant political upheaval in Europe. In 1685, King Louis XIV had revoked the Edict of Nantes and banished the Protestant Huguenots from France.¹⁷¹ Although the horrors of the continent's wars of religion were over, continual warfare between England and France meant political instability and an abiding fear for the worst that England might even revert back to Catholicism.¹⁷² Second, even during Edwards's time there was the imminent threat of enemy attacks. Old World battles were being fought in English North America, with New France (Canadian territories) and its Indian allies periodically making raids on the colony's frontiers. Even urban Bostonians were put on edge at times over rumors of such aggressions.¹⁷³ But the northern and western parts of Massachusetts were especially vulnerable.

Just a year after Edwards was born the town of Deerfield experienced one of the region's most savage attacks. Edwards's aunt, Eunice, and two young children were

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 12. Cotton Mather thought the Huguenot persecutions might correspond to the slaying of the witnesses in Revelation 11. Making calculations based on the work of European eschatologists, Mather came upon the fall of the Antichrist as occurring in the year 1697, which seemed to converge seamlessly with his thoughts on the date of the fall of the Turks. See Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 339-40.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ David D. Hall, "The Mental World of Samuel Sewall," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd series, no. 92 (1980): 24. For an overview of Boston's role as the hub of the colonial settlements, see Mark Peterson, *The City State of Boston: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Power, 1630-1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

brutally murdered; his uncle, the Rev. John Williams, and three of his cousins were taken captive north to Canada.¹⁷⁴ Two years later his uncle was miraculously able to return with two of his children and wrote a best-selling account, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*.¹⁷⁵ The book, first published in 1707, undoubtedly cast unto the Edwards clan the palpability of satanic influence and the concrete reality of Catholic France as an instrument of Rome and the Antichrist.¹⁷⁶ Third, although they were far removed from the struggles of the original settlers of New England, death, disease, and natural disasters were still very much sources of existential dread.

By the time of Edwards's birth, New England soil was rich with apocalyptic concerns. Influential clergy of the prior generations had accustomed the people to the language of the apocalyptic.¹⁷⁷ But Puritan fascination with the apocalyptic was certainly not limited to ministers and divines. For example, Edward Johnson (1598-1672) was a first-generation trader who was a resident in the Massachusetts settlement of Woburn.¹⁷⁸ His *Wonder-Working Providence* (c. 1650) provides a glimpse into how early on the

¹⁷⁴ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 29. Marsden, *Edwards: A Life*, 14. For detailed accounts of the famous raid see John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (New York: Knopf, 1994). Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, *Captors and Captives: The 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

¹⁷⁵ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 17. See John Williams, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion, or, A faithful History of Remarkable Occurrences in the Captivity and Deliverance of Mr. John Williams* (Northampton, MA: Hopkins, Bridgman, and Company, 1853).

¹⁷⁶ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 17.

¹⁷⁷ Lowance, *The Language of Canaan*, 116-177.

¹⁷⁸ Heimert and Delbanco, "Edward Johnson, Wonder-Working Providence of Sion's Savior in New England," 112.

language of chiliarism became familiar to the broader population.¹⁷⁹ It was primarily an historical account of the progress of the colonies, with reports on the founders and the founding of one town after another. But it was also a work with a religious and political agenda, a polemical defense of the New England Way against those who may have questioned the legitimacy of the colony's existence after Puritans in England gained hegemony at the end of the 1640s.¹⁸⁰ Its legacy lies, however, not in its polemics, but in the strong militant apocalyptic language Johnson employed. Toward the end of the work Johnson framed his colonial history as a preparatory time for the apocalyptic struggle ahead. He wrote: "behold the Lord Christ marshalling of his invincible Army to the battell: some suppose this onely to be mysticall, and not literall at all: assuredly the spirituall fight is chiefly to be attended, and the other not neglected, having a neer dependancy one upon the other, especially at this time."¹⁸¹ The metaphor and imagery of the lowly, poor army of the Lord in New England rising against the Pope and the future forces of the Antichrist left a lasting impression on the already emerging apocalyptic cosmology of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) served as Chief Justice of Massachusetts and was one of the wealthiest citizens of New England due to having the mint master of Boston as his

¹⁷⁹ Edward Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence*, ed., J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910). Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 233.

¹⁸⁰ Edward J. Gallagher, "An Overview of Edward Johnson's 'Wonder-Working Providence,'" *Early American Literature* 5, no. 3 (Winter 1971): 30.

¹⁸¹ Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, 270.

father-in-law.¹⁸² Like his contemporary and close friend, Cotton Mather, Sewall too was a devotee of the apocalyptic. Sewall was nearly as diligent as Mather in gathering evidence from all over the world in search for any news that might relate to the end-times prophecies. In *Phaenomena quaedam Apocalyptica*, published in 1697, Sewall made the case for the New World being the seat of the New Jerusalem, possibly somewhere in the Spanish colonies.¹⁸³ Like Edward Johnson a generation before him, Sewall was a staunch defender of the settlement in the New World. What is remarkable though is that even as a layperson his work was saturated with learned scholarly and biblical material regarding the apocalyptic. His writing reveals he had imbibed deeply from the well of the New England eschatology.¹⁸⁴

The degree to which the New England eschatology filtered down to the general population is difficult to determine. As E. Brooks Holifield states: “We simply do not know the extent of popular interest in the writings of theologians in early America or the degree to which formal theology guided religious practice.”¹⁸⁵ But there are certainly socio-historical indicators that apocalypticism was of popular interest in New England. The abiding Puritan sense of the fleeting nature of life and of God’s judgment was often couched in apocalyptic terms.¹⁸⁶ Even a few years before Edwards was born, Cotton

¹⁸² Heimert and Delbanco, “Samuel Sewall, Diary,” in *The Puritans in America*, 277.

¹⁸³ Smauel Sewall, *Phaenomena quaedam Apocalyptica* (Boston: B. Green & J. Allen, 1697), 31. Hall, “Mental World of Samuel Sewall,” 32.

¹⁸⁴ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, ix.

¹⁸⁵ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 3.

¹⁸⁶ Perry Miller, “The End of the World,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (April 1951): 172.

Mather had advanced the year 1697 as a possible date for the imminent end of the world.¹⁸⁷ A later revision by Mather pushed back the date to 1716, the year Edwards, age thirteen, would leave for a school that would later become Yale.¹⁸⁸ Mather's persistence in publishing material which revealed his predilection for date-setting is but one example that a highly literate public had a vested interest in the subject. It was a time when *The Day of Doom*, a poem by the minister and poet, Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705), could be considered perhaps the colony's first best seller.¹⁸⁹ The poem painted a vivid picture of Christ coming suddenly upon unprepared sinners like a thief in the night:

For at midnight breaks forth a light,
 which turns the night to day,
 And speedily an hideous cry
 doth all the World dismay.
 Sinners awake, their hearts do ache,
 trembling their loins surpriseth;
 Amaz'd with fear, by what they hear,
 each one of them ariseth.
 They rush from beds with giddy heads,
 and to their windows run,
 Viewing this light, which shines more bright
 than doth the noon-day Sun.
 Straightway appears (they see't with tears)
 the Son of God most dread,
 Who with his Train comes on amain
 to judge both Quick and Dead.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Cotton Mather, "Problema Theologicum," 420n181. Also Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 62. Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 339-40.

¹⁸⁸ Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus," 384-385.

¹⁸⁹ Smolinski, introduction to "The Threefold Paradise," 38. See also Wojcik, *The End of the World*, 23. Wojcik notes there are no extant first or second editions of the work possibly due to over-perusal. One estimate posits that one out of every twenty citizens of the Massachusetts Bay Colony had purchased the poem.

¹⁹⁰ Michael Wigglesworth, *The Day of Doom or, a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment* (New York: American News Company, 1867), 22.

Edwards thus grew up with a heightened awareness that life was fraught with apocalyptic concerns. Although the times lent itself to an apocalyptic outlook it was not always taken as necessarily a doomsday scenario.¹⁹¹ Puritan apocalypticism was a worldview that also celebrated the glory of God. For Edwards, the place where he grew up was a source of beauty and wonderment. As a young boy he had open access to the trees, hills, and fields and was able to appreciate the wonders of God's creation. Edwards's famous "Spider Essay," which was thought to have been written before he left for college, was actually penned when he was twenty.¹⁹² But the detailed observational research must have been collected much earlier. Even if no longer evidence of his intellectual precociousness, the essay reveals Edwards's powers of observation and his sensitivity to nature's aesthetics.¹⁹³ Fear, death, Satan, Catholic Antichrist, the Second Coming, nature, beauty, creation—all these tensions and paradoxes of the time and place of Edwards's early life would serve as inspirations for his emerging eschatological cosmology.

Edwards grew up in a large family and while he revered his mother, Esther, and had close relationships with his sisters, especially Mary and Jersusha, he was most

¹⁹¹ Miller, "The End of the World," 172.

¹⁹² Wallace E. Anderson, editor's introduction to *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 6, Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 6–7. George Claghorn found the original letter regarding the "Spider Essay" which is dated October 31, 1723.

¹⁹³ Regarding an earlier dating of the "Spider Essay" and the legend of Edwards's precocity, see Sereno Edwards Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830), 28. Perry Miller picks up on this wrong dating of the Spider essay in his biography of Edwards, originally published in 1949, see Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 37, as does Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 36–37.

influenced by the two men in his life, his father, Timothy and his maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. The Reverend Timothy Edwards was by all accounts a well-disciplined person who was a competent and respected pastor as well as a warm but exacting father.¹⁹⁴ Like most young men at the time preparing for a life in ministry he matriculated at Harvard. If he was given to a seriousness surpassing his peers he had reasonable justification. The family on his mother's side exhibited serious mental and moral deficiencies. One of his aunts killed her own child, an uncle had murdered one of his own sisters with an ax.¹⁹⁵ Timothy's mother was so prone to infidelities and displays of uncontrollable rage that his father eventually secured a divorce, an act nearly unheard of in Puritan New England.¹⁹⁶ Although one can only speculate, Jonathan Edwards's own bouts of melancholy throughout his life may be traced to his paternal grandmother's family line.

Fortunately, Timothy Edwards married well and created a loving and stable family. As a minister Timothy laid the pastoral foundation for his son by emphasizing the preaching of the New Birth.¹⁹⁷ He presided over several revivals in his parish around the years 1712-13. In *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737), Jonathan Edwards's account detailing the revival in his Northampton congregation in the 1730s, he

¹⁹⁴ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 21-22.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁹⁶ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 18-19. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 22-23.

¹⁹⁷ Harry Stout, "The Puritans and Edwards," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Harry Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 144. The "New Birth" was a common term used by Puritan revivalists to refer to the evangelical conversion of being "born again," as reflected in John 3:3.

noted, “There has been a very great ingathering of souls to Christ in that place, and something considerable of the same work began afterwards in East Windsor, my honored father's parish, which has in times past been a place favored with mercies of this nature above any on this western side of New England, excepting Northampton.”¹⁹⁸ In that one sentence Edwards linked the three generations of evangelical revivalists in his family line. Like his father, Edwards’s maternal grandfather was also an expert in evangelical conversion.

Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) was such a spiritual force that a legend arose as to his outsized influence as the congregational “pope” of the Connecticut Valley.¹⁹⁹ He was of the same generation as Increase Mather and while Increase was the most influential minister in most of New England, Stoddard held sway in the western parts of Massachusetts and the Connecticut River area, where regional intermarriage had created several leading clans dubbed the “river gods.”²⁰⁰ Stoddard was best known for his role in determining the future of how the church would deal with the sacraments. Based on scriptural support Protestants had preserved two of the Catholic Church’s seven sacraments—baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The common practice of the Puritan churches was to baptize children whose parents were full communicant members. An

¹⁹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 4, Great Awakening*, ed. C.C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 154.

¹⁹⁹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 11. Paul Lucas downplays the notion of Stoddard’s hegemony over the Connecticut Valley. See Paul Lucas, “The Death of the Prophet Lamented: The Legacy of Solomon Stoddard,” in *Jonathan Edwards’s Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 69-84.

²⁰⁰ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 6.

emerging question for the congregational church was: What happens when these children become adult upstanding church members but do not go through the proper process of conversion? Should baptism be open to the children of these “half-way” members? And what about access to the Lord’s Supper?²⁰¹ The Synod of 1662 settled on a viable compromise—these half-way members could bring their children for baptism, but the Lord’s Supper would be preserved for those who testified to a salvation experience, a system that came to be known as the Half-Way Covenant.²⁰²

These ecclesiastical debates took on a greater degree of significance when it came to matters of church membership and full communicants. The Lord’s Supper was open only to those who demonstrated a satisfactory standard of Puritan conversion. However, Stoddard proposed that it be open to those persons that professed a general faith and were in good standing in the church and community.²⁰³ Stoddard stated his reasons for this arrangement in a controversial work, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches*, published in London in 1700.²⁰⁴ He wrote that the Lord’s Supper was an ordinance that “hath a proper tendency to draw sinners to Christ,” and although it was not meant for the unconverted, it was a “means of regeneration.”²⁰⁵ Finding inspiration of a church model, not on the New Testament church of “visible saints,” but on the Old Testament model of the “instituted”

²⁰¹ Ibid., 30.

²⁰² Noll, *America’s God*: 40-41.

²⁰³ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 105.

²⁰⁴ Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches, Explained, and Proved from the Word of God* (London: Ralph Smith, 1700).

²⁰⁵ Stoddard, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches*, 22.

or national church, Stoddard argued that all members of a particular community should have the privileges of God's promises.²⁰⁶ Although pushback came quickly, especially from the pens of Increase (Stoddard's brother-in-law) and Cotton Mather, Stoddardism or "Mr. Stoddard's Way" as it would be come to be known, was adopted by a number of churches, making Solomon Stoddard a household name throughout New England.²⁰⁷

Historians continue to debate the effects Stoddardism had on the congregational church in New England. Perry Miller believed it was Stoddard's method to maintain clerical hegemony over the congregation in a time of rapid frontier expansion.²⁰⁸ Ola Winslow paints Stoddard as the great liberalizing force in New England, paving the way for the more well-off elites of the community to be satisfied with being members of the church while rejecting genuine commitment.²⁰⁹ She goes even further, seeing these ecclesiastical and theological controversies as harbingers of the eventual liberal vs. conservative divide. This battle would emerge later with the founding of Yale College after the election of John Leverett as the president of Harvard in 1707 instead of the conservative Cotton Mather.²¹⁰ Sacvan Bercovitch identifies the adoption of the Half-

²⁰⁶ Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical*, 14.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 14-15. Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 106. For representative studies of the Half-Way Covenant see Edward S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), Robert G. Pope, *Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), and E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

²⁰⁸ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 257. For an effective counter-argument see James P. Walsh, "Solomon Stoddard's Open Communion: A Reexamination," *The New England Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 1970): 99.

²⁰⁹ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 104.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Way Covenant as the beginning of the slow decline of Puritan theocracy in New England.²¹¹ The liberal/conservative divide also touches upon tensions between the Federal theology of national covenant and the evangelical theology of the individual covenant of grace.²¹² Nevertheless, the Half-Way Covenant would be a recurring issue within New England congregationalism well into the eighteenth century and would even figure into Jonathan Edwards's dismissal from Northampton. As it pertains to conversion and who belongs in the invisible church of the saints, these themes will emerge again and will be explored further. But for now it would suffice to turn our attention to the primacy of conversion in Jonathan Edwards's life and how from early on it informed his evangelical eschatology.

Starting in 1712, Timothy Edwards began to oversee the rumblings of revival in East Windsor and four years later, young Jonathan would comment on the noticeable difference among his father's congregation in the number of those seeking to be saved.²¹³ But he did not count himself among them. A year later he left for college, not to Harvard as his father and grandfather had done, but to the upstart Collegiate School in Connecticut (later Yale College) that was founded by Cotton Mather and others in Boston who disapproved of Harvard's liberalizing tendencies.²¹⁴ As a student Edwards displayed

²¹¹ Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, 94.

²¹² Stout, "The Puritans and Edwards," 143. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 12-14. The Federal theology of national covenant took the Old Testament model of the Israelites as typological for the instituted church. Within the national covenant, it was a birthright to participate in the spiritual community. This was at times in tension with Congregational evangelicalism which emphasized the New Testament model of the importance of an individual's New Birth.

²¹³ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 33.

²¹⁴ Gura, *Jonathan Edwards America's Evangelical*, 23.

his formidable intelligence but in matters of spirituality he felt he fell short. By seventeen Edwards was a young man deeply occupied by theological concerns. His awkward social disposition, superior intelligence, and spiritual intensity made him sort of an outsider among the boys at school, which further drove him to live like a monk.²¹⁵

After graduating at the age of nineteen, Edwards took a non-ordained ministerial position at a church in New York City. During his time there Edwards wrote his “Resolutions” and started a detailed spiritual diary.²¹⁶ In the first of the seventy resolutions he endeavored to keep and read at least once a week, Edwards resolved to “do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence.”²¹⁷ On the first entry in his diary, dated December 18, 1722, he made an honest diagnosis of his spiritual state, even questioning whether indeed he had saving faith: “The reason why I, in the least, question my interest in God's love and favor, is, 1) Because I cannot speak so fully to my experience of that preparatory work, of which divines speak; 2) I do not remember that I experienced regeneration, exactly in those steps, in which divines say it is generally wrought; 3) I do not feel the Christian graces sensibly enough, particularly faith.”²¹⁸ Edwards’s preoccupation with his

²¹⁵ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 37-39.

²¹⁶ Gura, *Jonathan Edwards America's Evangelical*, 32.

²¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Resolutions*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16, Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 753.

²¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Diary*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16, Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 759.

conversion continued on, where in an entry dated August 12, he expressed with a mix of frustration and determination: “The chief thing, that now makes me in any measure to question my good estate, is my not having experienced conversion in those particular steps, wherein the people of New England, and anciently the Dissenters of Old England, used to experience it. Wherefore, now resolved, never to leave searching, till I have satisfyingly found out the very bottom and foundation, the real reason, why they used to be converted in those steps.”²¹⁹

The Puritans had developed a tradition of deconstructing one’s experience of salvation. Over time this preparationist “morphology of conversion” became, in practice, reified to such an extent that it often became a checklist involving an acute understanding of one’s need for God, a deep sense of humiliation and disappointment over one’s sinfulness. Only after satisfactory (albeit subjective) agonizing over such things, finally, if God wills, came saving faith.²²⁰ In his “Personal Narrative,” a later account of his conversion experience, Edwards dismissed his childhood religious inclinations as just that—immature religious mimicry; once the allure of “performance” wore off, he “returned like a dog to his vomit, and went on in ways of sin.”²²¹ In his last year of college, while in the midst of struggling over the state of his soul, Edwards had to contend with a bout of pleurisy “in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me

²¹⁹ *Diary* in WJE 16:779.

²²⁰ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 373. For classic studies on the Puritan morphology of conversion see: Morgan’s *Visible Saints* and Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

²²¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Personal Narrative*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16, Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 791.

over the pit of hell,” but even then after a period of recovery he found himself backsliding to his “old ways of sin.”²²² Edwards recalled going through “great and violent inward struggles” and “many conflicts of wicked inclinations” but yet vowed to make “seeking my salvation the main business of my life.”²²³

The spiritual breakthrough, however, seems to come rather abruptly in the narrative. Edwards confessed he always had objections to the dreadful doctrine of the sovereignty of God and the arbitrary nature of the redeemed and the damned. But without much further context Edwards wrote of the unexpected change in his view. The testimony of this transformative process is worth looking at in detail:

The first that I remember that ever I found anything of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, 1 Timothy 1:17, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen." ...From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. I had an inward, sweet sense of these things, that at times came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged, to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ; and the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation, by free grace in him.²²⁴

Edwards’s new “inward, sweet delight in God and divine things” closely mirrors the reason/affection dichotomy that would come to characterize his later theological works. For on the one hand it seems his breakthrough was primarily intellectual, where

²²² *Personal Narrative* in WJE 16:791.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 792-793.

after reading 1 Timothy 1:17 Edwards was able to comprehend the glory of the divine being and the vast God of the universe. His mind could finally wrap itself around the great mystery of the sovereignty of God. On the other hand, Edwards seems to have been captivated by an irresistible spiritual force. Nearly mystical, his renewed outlook on life afterwards took on “new sensibilities” and he went about like St. Francis of Assisi in contemplating on the beauty and excellency of Christ while enjoying the sun, moon, stars, clouds, the grass, flowers, and trees as though even the natural world around him had changed.²²⁵

The passage also suggests why Edwards questioned the traditional pattern of Puritan conversion. For even as he was undergoing this inward spiritual transformation, at the time he was not able to see anything of a “saving nature in this.”²²⁶ In dissecting his own conversion Edwards was able to discern the fine line between feelings, emotions, head knowledge, and saving faith. He saw in himself the dangers of self-deceit and false assurances, comparing his newfound appreciation of the delights of religion with his boyhood religiosity where the notions of God “never reached the heart; and did not arise from any sight of the divine excellency of the things of God; or any taste of the soul-satisfying, and life-giving good, there is in them.”²²⁷ He began to see in the agony of his soul before conversion and the aftermath of a new sense of his heart as participating in the divine narrative of God’s grand work of redemption. Hence began a lifelong journey

²²⁵ Ibid., 793-794.

²²⁶ Ibid., 793

²²⁷ Ibid., 795.

of trying to understand God's salvific work in history. As Kenneth Minkema puts it, Edwards "would make a career of studying souls under conversion."²²⁸

While Edwards was still in New York he began a series of notebooks. The *Miscellanies*, his ruminations on theology and philosophy, contain many of his earliest entries on apocalyptic themes.²²⁹ As he viewed world events unfolding before his eyes in the bustling port city of New York he developed the habit of interpreting them in the light of the unfolding plan of God's redemptive history.²³⁰ He would write: "If I heard the least hint of anything that happened in any part of the world, that appeared to me, in some respect or other, to have a favorable aspect on the interest of Christ's kingdom, my soul eagerly caught at it; and it would much animate and refresh me. I used to be earnest to read public news-letters, mainly for that end; to see if I could not find some news favorable to the interest of religion in the world."²³¹

In 1723 Edwards started a separate notebook, *Notes on the Apocalypse*, which put into writing his intense interest in all things related to the end times. Edwards recounted walking along the banks of the Hudson River, sometimes accompanied by his friend, John Smith, where they would "converse of the things of God; and our conversation used

²²⁸ Kenneth P. Minkema, "Personal Writings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41.

²²⁹ Thomas A. Shafer, editor's introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 13, The "Miscellanies," a-500* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 11. The initial entries are labeled by letters of the alphabet, a-z and then with double-letters, i.e., aa-zz. The first entry with an apocalyptic theme is k., which deals with the millennium, followed by hh., Antichrist, uu., Apocalypse; ww., Four Beasts; xx., Vials; yy., Woman in the Wilderness.

²³⁰ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 60.

²³¹ *Personal Narrative*, in WJE 16:797.

much to turn on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world, and the glorious things that God would accomplish for his church in the latter days.”²³² This became *de facto* his personal hobby. Edwards wrote:

My heart has been much on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. The histories of the past advancement of Christ's kingdom, have been sweet to me. When I have read histories of past ages, the pleasantest thing in all my reading has been, to read of the kingdom of Christ being promoted...And my mind has been much entertained and delighted, with the Scripture promises and prophecies, of the future glorious advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth.²³³

Over the course of his lifetime the *Notes* would bring together the best scholarship on the various topics related to Revelation. Current events, the latest scientific discoveries, and even the latest philosophical systems were all subsumed under an eschatological framework.²³⁴ His labor in collecting information on different subject matters was the beginning of a lifetime effort to seek patterns and connections between them, all in an effort to plumb the depths of God’s salvation mystery and final consummation and redemption.

Natural and Supernatural Birth Pangs, 1727-1739

With Solomon Stoddard entering his twilight years he sought out an assistant pastor who could eventually take over the pastorate. Stoddard’s hand-picked choice was

²³² *Ibid.*, 797.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 800.

²³⁴ Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:11. In addition to seeking out the best material on standard subjects such as geography, history, biblical typology, and the Church Fathers, Edwards also mentions “cabalistical learning of the Jews.” Edwards’s research had an extensive and eclectic reach.

his pious and serious grandson. After a brief stint as a pastor in Bolton, Connecticut (1723-24), Edwards was serving as a tutor at Yale when the offer from his grandfather came. During these years at Yale (1724-26) Edwards was going through a time of ill health and deep spiritual depression. The call from Northampton was a wake-up call that would force him out of his spiritual slumber. He began to assist his grandfather in the Fall of 1726 and was eventually ordained in February, 1727.²³⁵ In July of that year he married Sarah Pierpont, the younger sister of his friend and fellow tutor at Yale, James Pierpont Jr.²³⁶ Her father was the prominent minister of the First Church of New Haven, one of the founders of Yale, and the principal trustee of the college. Sarah came from a ministerial line even more distinguished than Edwards, counting Thomas Hooker (1586-1647) among her illustrious ancestors.²³⁷ She was socially more graceful than her erudite, occasionally awkward spouse.²³⁸ From the beginning they made a complementary pairing.²³⁹

²³⁵ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 111.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 114. Thomas Hooker was a contemporary of John Cotton and the founder of the settlement of Hartford and the colony of Connecticut. For Hooker's influence in Connecticut see Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976).

²³⁸ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 114.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

Birth Pangs of Revival: The "Little Revival" of 1734-35

When Edwards took the position to be the eventual successor to his grandfather in Northampton he could not have anticipated the season of revival to come. Historians, however, have the luxury of looking back and seeing the confluence of formative and even symbolic events as well as fortuitous circumstances that could be shaped into a compelling narrative. One of these spiritually and symbolically momentous occasions was a great earthquake that struck New England one Sunday evening on October 29, 1727.²⁴⁰ It was a preparatory foreshadowing of the spiritual rumblings to come. In Puritan New England earthquakes and other natural disasters often served as heavenly signs or warnings.²⁴¹ They were seen as both God's punishment and God's mercy in leading his people to repentance. Cotton Mather even believed that the Second Coming would be ushered in by earthquakes and he rejoiced at any news of earthly tremors around the world.²⁴² In an essay on earthquakes he could without hesitation proclaim: "O Wonderful! O Wonderful! Our God, instead of sending Earthquakes to destroy us as He justly might, He send them to fetch us home into Himself, and to do us the greatest Good in the World!"²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Kenneth P. Minkema, preface to the period, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 14, Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 32.

²⁴¹ Harry Stout, "The Puritans and Edwards," 146.

²⁴² Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 340.

²⁴³ Cotton Mather, *Boanerges: A short essay to preserve and strengthen the good impressions produced by earthquakes on the minds of people that have been awakened with them* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1727), 38. Quoted in Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 119-120.

Like Cotton Mather, whose scientific writings qualified him entrance into the prestigious Royal Society of London, Edwards was as well-read in natural philosophy as he was in theology.²⁴⁴ He was always in search for the latest books on scientific inquiry; even just a few months before his death the final entry in his “Catalogues of Books,”—the record of the books sought after, acquired, borrowed, or lent within his intellectual orbit—was a work on geometry.²⁴⁵ In a notebook entry in his “Miscellanies,” Edwards wrote: “The vastness of the universe, and all it evidences of God’s power and wisdom in every part, as discovered by both telescope and microscope, and all the late discoveries of modern philosophy and astronomy, are a great argument of the exceeding great future happiness of the godly, and misery of the wicked.”²⁴⁶ Edwards saw in nature God’s divine fingerprints in the active process of realizing future glory. In detailing the trajectory of the great comet of 1680, Edwards observed how the celestial path of the comet’s origin and demise was evidence that the world too would one day come to an end.²⁴⁷ So although he understood quite well the mechanisms of natural phenomena, he was foremost a preacher in the Puritan tradition and he seized the opportunity to infuse

²⁴⁴ Peter J. Theusen, editor’s introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 26, Catalogues of Books* (New Haven, CT Yale University Press, 2008), 77. Theusen surmises that a young Edwards must have had ambitions to one day be elected to the Royal Society just as Cotton Mather had and for this purpose he sought to publish his “Spider Essay” through the aid of Paul Dudley, a Massachusetts judge and fellow of the society.

²⁴⁵ Thusen, editor’s introduction to WJE 26:77.

²⁴⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 930 in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 20, The Miscellanies, Entry Nos. 833-1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 175.

²⁴⁷ “Miscellanies,” no. 1038 and no.1041 in WJE 20:378, 381.

the earthquake of 1727 with spiritual meaning. Edwards and his ministerial colleagues had a captive audience all over New England as after nine days of aftershocks, people were in a state of “legal terrors.”²⁴⁸ The atmosphere was conducive to revival preaching and from nearly every pulpit preachers warned of impending judgment and beckoned unbelievers to be converted.²⁴⁹ For many clergymen and their congregations the earthquake was a providential portent of apocalyptic expectations. Thomas Prince (1687-1758), the great chronicler of New England history and minister of the Old South Church, preached a fast and Thanksgiving sermon that November, *Earthquakes the Works of God and Tokens of his just Displeasure*, where from Revelation 16 he reminded his hearers regarding the Second Coming of Christ: “Behold I come as a Thief: Blessed is He that Watcheth—And there were Voices and Thunders & Lightnings, and there was a great Earthquake, such as was not since Men were upon the Earth, so mighty an Earthquake and so great.”²⁵⁰ Prince alerted his congregation to the necessity of the birth pangs of the natural world as precursors to both blessed and dreadful end of the world:

AT the end of this present State of the World, will be such a universal sudden and destroying Earthquake. But till that amazing time comes on, our Blessed SAVIOUR tells us; There shall be Famines, Pestilences, Troubles, Great Earthquakes in diverse Places, and fearful Sightings and great Signs from Heaven: That these are the Beginning of Sorrows, and the Signs of his Coming, and of the End of the World.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 121.

²⁴⁹ Minkema, preface to the period, in WJE 14:33.

²⁵⁰ Thomas Prince, *Earthquakes the Works of God and Tokens of his just Displeasure* (Boston: D. Henchman, 1727), 5.

²⁵¹ Prince, *Earthquakes the Works of God*, 6.

In late December the governor of Massachusetts instituted a fast day and in the fast-day sermon at Northampton Edwards preached: “God sometimes threatens and warns a people by extraordinary things in providence, sometimes by strange sights in the heavens, and sometimes by earthquakes...Earthquakes and lights in the heaven may often have natural causes yet they may nevertheless be ordered to be as a forerunner of great changes and Judgments.”²⁵² For Edwards, this particular earthquake was a God-given opening for him to live up to the moment. For the better part of the year Solomon Stoddard and Edwards had worked together to make hell a concrete reality in the lives of the Northampton congregants.²⁵³ Now with his grandfather advanced in age, Edwards devoted a better part of the fast-day sermon not pontificating about the metaphysical ramifications of a God who might send earthquakes, but reinforcing the need to address matters of concrete practical ministry by rebuking the youth for their penchant for late-night, mixed-gender frolics. Edwards railed:

Be warned to forsake your evening and night wickedness by that earthquake that lately terrified you in the night. And especially reform the ill-spending of sabbath-day nights. 'Tis the very probable opinion of some that the earthquake was sent as a token of God's anger against not only the wickedness of the land in general, but more especially the sin that is committed on a sabbath-day night.²⁵⁴

²⁵²Jonathan Edwards, *Impending Judgments Averted Only by Reformation* in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 14, Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 220. The occasional sermon was a long-standing tradition in New England. The fast-day and election day sermons were opportunities for the community to come together for deep reflection, prayer, and repentance. It reified notions of a national covenant by signaling that the town or city's religious and civic duties were closely aligned.

²⁵³ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 120.

²⁵⁴ *Impending Judgments Averted Only by Reformation*, in WJE 14:226-227.

Whether the ever-logical Edwards was comfortable in putting his own name to such “an opinion” that the earthquake was sent against late night frolics we cannot know. But this fast-day sermon reveals an Edwards fully invested first and foremost in the conversion of souls and especially for the congregation’s youth, for his spiritual intuition was that it would be the young who would be at the vanguard of revival in Northampton.²⁵⁵

Another symbolic moment for Edwards around this time was the birth of his first child, Sarah. Like many life-altering events of his life Edwards marked it with spiritual meaning. Childbirth was another illustration of the way God brought forth good things, through suffering and affliction, as Edwards wrote: “Women travail and suffer great pains in bringing children, which is to represent the great persecutions and sufferings of the church in bringing forth Christ and in increasing the number of his children; and a type of those spiritual pains that are in the soul when bringing forth Christ.”²⁵⁶ Just as earthquakes and natural phenomena could be interpreted as “birth pangs” of a spiritual nature, physical “birth pangs” were shadows of a deeper, spiritual reality of the suffering needed for spiritual birth. In 1729, Edwards’s life was once more shaken with the passing of Solomon Stoddard. At the age of twenty-six Edwards was now tasked with filling the town’s ecclesiastical and civic void. While it seems like in so many ways Edwards’s entire life had been geared for this very transition, the stress of having to oversee a large

²⁵⁵ Harry S. Stout, “Edwards the Revivalist,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125.

²⁵⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Images of Divine Things*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 11, Typological Writing*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson and David Watters (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 54.

congregation soon became overwhelming and he had to contend with another serious bout of illness.²⁵⁷ At the end of the year Edwards mourned another death with the passing of his most cherished sibling, his saintly younger sister, Jerusha.²⁵⁸ The agony of the suffering pangs of both birth and death formed the early basis for Edwards's afflictive view of revival and redemption.²⁵⁹

Although Edwards would characterize the revivals that came to Northampton in 1734-35 as "surprising," they could also be seen as a result of Edwards's assiduous labors in cultivating the conditions necessary for reviving his congregation through his preaching and teaching ministry. Revivals, in fact, were not unfamiliar territory for Northampton and the Connecticut River Valley. Edwards had noted various sorts having taken place at both his father's and grandfather's congregations decades earlier. After establishing himself in Northampton, Edwards began developing a reputation amongst the New England clergy. In 1731 he made a successful preaching debut at the "Thursday Public Lecture" in Boston with *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, By the Greatness of Man's Dependence upon Him, in the Whole of it*.²⁶⁰ Among the most enthused in the audience were some of Boston's leading Reformed clergymen who made

²⁵⁷ Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 118.

²⁵⁸ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 128.

²⁵⁹ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 129-132

²⁶⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, By the Greatness of Man's Dependence upon Him, in the Whole of it* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1731). Thomas A. Shafer, editor's introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 13, "The "Miscellanies": (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 2.

sure to procure its publication.²⁶¹ As the title suggests Edward's first published piece was a stalwart defense of orthodox Calvinism.²⁶² The implied threat was what many in the Reformed tradition saw as an encroaching Arminianism, which was deemed by Calvinists to emphasize a human-centered approach to soteriology. The sermon showed Edwards's early commitment to preaching conversion as the great work of redemption, a primarily God-centered, divinely initiated activity.²⁶³ This would be the theological crux of Edwards's assessment of the Northampton revival, the emphasis not on the surprising work, but on the certainty that it was the work of God.

The revivals started its bloom in the Spring of 1734 but signs of spiritual renewal began even earlier. It waned in intensity by the middle of 1735 and then eventually died down by the end of the year. Edwards would put the revivals into historical context and become its most famous advocate and apologist by retelling the events in *A Faithful Narrative*, a full-length version appearing in print in 1737.²⁶⁴ In his narrative Edwards

²⁶¹ Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards*, 118. It was published with a preface by two leading Boston ministers, Thomas Prince and William Cooper. See also Gura, *Jonathan Edwards America's Evangelical*, 67. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 140-141.

²⁶² Kenneth Minkema notes Edwards begrudgingly accepted the Calvinist label to distinguish himself from Arminianism but that Edwards only cited Calvin once in his works. Minkema also adds that Samuel Hopkins noted Edwards was *Calvinistic*, but was an original and did not rely on Calvin. See Kenneth P. Minkema, "A 'Dortian Philosophe': Jonathan Edwards, Calvin, and Reformed Orthodoxy," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1/2 (2011): 242. While acknowledging the nuances, for the purposes of the dissertation Edwards's Calvinism will be treated as generally reflective of New England Reformed Orthodoxy.

²⁶³ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 16. See also John F. Wilson, editor's introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 9, A History of the Work of Redemption* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 4.

²⁶⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (London: John Oswald, 1737). Edwards first wrote a summary of the revivals to Benjamin Colman in a letter dated May 30, 1735. At the request of Colman Edwards sent a longer version, which Colman abridged and published in 1736.

recalled that even before the revivals began the young people of the town expressed greater concern for the fate of their souls. Then in a little village of Pascommuck, three miles away from the center of town, a group of people were “savingsly wrought upon,” that is, they marked a genuine conversion experience.²⁶⁵ In April, the sudden death of a young man with pleurisy made an impact on the youth. Then just two months later, a sickly young married woman showed reassuring evidences of saving grace before succumbing to her illness, which further elevated the heightened sense of the need for eternal security among the young.²⁶⁶ In order to keep up the momentum of their religious concerns Edwards organized meetings for the purpose of fostering “social religion.”²⁶⁷ In December, a young woman with a scandalous reputation marked a dramatic conversion experience and demonstrated a transformed life. Initially Edwards was concerned that her conversion would be met with mockery and derision by some but it turned out to be “the greatest occasion of awakening to others, of anything that ever came to pass in the town.”²⁶⁸

For a detailed record of the intricacies of the publication of the various editions, see C.C. Goen, editor’s introduction to *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 4, The Great Awakening* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 32-42.

²⁶⁵ *Faithful Narrative*, in WJE 4:147.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 147-148.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 148. By “social religion” Edwards was referring to small-group meetings that would meet to discuss the day’s sermon or lectures. Similar conventicles for the young were practiced in the German Pietistic circles of Philipp Spener, August Hermann Francke and Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Edwards was familiar with various aspects of German Pietism. See John F. Wilson, editor’s introduction to WJE 9:30.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

Within a six-month period Edwards estimated more than three hundred people who were “savingly brought home to Christ.”²⁶⁹ Edwards marveled that unlike previous awakenings the indiscriminate blanketing of the Holy Spirit was one of the distinguishing marks of this surprising work of God: “There was scarcely a single person in the town, either old or young, that was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world. Those that were wont to be the vainest and loosest, and those that had been most disposed to think and speak slightly of vital and experimental religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings.”²⁷⁰ Previous awakenings were localized events and relegated to young people and mostly female in composition. These revivals spread through multiple localities in Western Massachusetts and Connecticut (Edwards noted concurrent revivals in the Mid-Atlantic colonies) consisting of dozens of congregations, touching even the most difficult demographic to reach—middle-aged to elderly men.²⁷¹ Edwards even remarked on the born again experiences of “several Negroes.”²⁷²

Despite the successes Edwards was soon confronted by the reality that in the cosmic battle between God and Satan, the “surprising work” could cut both ways. For the better part of a year Northampton had experienced a season where “Satan seemed to be unusually restrained.”²⁷³ Even sickness and depression were held at bay until, at the

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 205.

height of the awakening, a troubled man named Thomas Stebbins tried unsuccessfully to slit his own throat. It was in May when Edwards noted: “it began to be very sensible that the Spirit of God was gradually withdrawing from us, and after this time Satan seemed to be more let loose, and raged in a dreadful manner.”²⁷⁴ An even more dreadful day hit home on June 1, 1735 on a Sunday when Joseph Hawley II, Edwards’s uncle by marriage, managed to end his life by slitting his own throat.²⁷⁵ Hawley was a well-respected but tortured soul whom Edwards tried desperately to minister to without success. As though it was a contagion others became adversely affected. Recalled Edwards:

And many that seemed to be under no melancholy, some pious persons that had no special darkness, or doubts about the goodness of their state, nor were under any special trouble or concern of mind about anything spiritual or temporal, yet had it urged upon 'em, as if somebody had spoke to 'em, “Cut your own throat, now is good opportunity: now, NOW!”²⁷⁶

As if mocking with devilish irony, taking one’s own life became a diabolical counterpoint to the rich harvest of spiritual new life. By the time Edwards wrote the lengthier version of the revival account he had time to structure his narrative in a way that addressed both the untimely suicides and the decline of the revivals. Edwards was also aware of his critics and doubters of his account as he acknowledged those who would think: “I am very fond of making a great many converts, and of magnifying and

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 206.

²⁷⁵ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 21.

²⁷⁶ *Faithful Narrative*, in WJE 4:206-207. Although Edwards did not provide further details of an apparent suicide epidemic, we know of at least one other instance of self-inflicted death, recorded by Edwards’s cousin, Stephen Williams of Longmeadow. In a diary entry on July 13, 1735, again on a Sunday, he noted that N. Burt II had “cut his own throat.” See Goen, editor’s introduction to WJE 4:47n7.

aggrandizing the matter; and to think that, for want of judgement, I take every religious pang and enthusiastic conceit for saving conversion.”²⁷⁷ There was some justification in accusing Edwards of being histrionic in juxtaposing the birth of spiritual new life through the biblical act of dying to one’s old self, with the death of those who came under the influence of Satan.²⁷⁸

In Edwards’s telling of the revivals death became a controlling conceit.

“Conversion is a great and glorious work of God's power, at once changing the heart and infusing life into the dead soul,” wrote Edwards.²⁷⁹ It was the death of some young people that sparked his congregation’s initial awakening. Of the two case studies of conversion Edwards highlighted—one of four-year old Phebe Bartlet and another of a young dying woman, Abigail Hutchinson, it was the latter account that acted as a counterweight to the tragic deaths of those who took their own lives. Young Abigail had faced death with great courage and dignity, gracefully and at peace with God. Even through much pain, with her throat swelling so much that she could hardly take in liquid, she was of such godly countenance that her quiet passing could serve as a model of death

²⁷⁷ *Faithful Narrative*, in WJE 4:159-160.

²⁷⁸ See Carl Sederholm, “The Trouble with Grace: Reading Jonathan Edwards’s ‘Faithful Narrative,’” *The New England Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (June 2012):326-327, 330. I believe Sederholm overstates his case when he writes: “In the most glaring instance of historical revisionism, Edwards manipulates chronology so that Hawley’s suicide falls toward the end of his tale,” and that Edwards is guilty of “temporal falsification” and that “his decision to alter the truth to suit a pattern of his own making is a significant biographical, historical, and (given the text’s impact) ecclesiastical occurrence worthy of scholarly investigation.” Sederholm’s accusation of Edwards’s chronological manipulation is rather involved, his main point being that the revivals mostly continued on for several months after the suicides. But Edwards could have shifted the emphasis on the timing of the suicides for narrative effect. When inexplicable events happened it was not uncommon for Puritan writers to seek a supra-chronological explanation that could shed light on either God’s or Satan’s work.

²⁷⁹ *Faithful Narrative*, in WJE 4:177.

being a kind of sleep.²⁸⁰ In stark contrast, the suicides were of the darkest, most palpably satanic kind—not of mere swelling but slitting of throats. For Edwards this could not be without spiritual significance. Just as he infused spiritual meaning into earthquakes and other natural phenomena, Edwards saw the timing of the deaths as the drastic measures Satan was willing to take in order to stop the runaway revival in its track.

Edwards’s sobering interpretation of the suicides might have functioned as a preemptive strike against those who would think this young minister was being too boastful, and its naked honesty lent a certain raw authenticity that could have diffused the judgments of would-be critics. Edwards also alluded to his awareness of the dangers of extremism by noting instances at Suffield and South Hadley of “strange enthusiastic delusions,” of one person who “was possessed with an opinion that it was the beginning of the glorious times of the church spoken in Scripture.”²⁸¹ At this point in Edwards’s ministry he was still wary of public declarations of apocalyptic speculation. As Stephen J. Stein writes: “in no period was Edwards’ public discretion on apocalyptic issues more evident than at the time of the surprising conversions in Northampton during the winter of 1734-35.”²⁸² In the narrative Edwards deliberately downplayed any apocalyptic connotations by squelching the rumor that during the revivals the people of Northampton thought the world was coming to an end, calling it a “false report.”²⁸³

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁸² Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:19.

²⁸³ *Faithful Narrative*, in WJE 4:190.

Although Edwards claimed that much of the spirit of the revivals was still bearing fruit, he closed the narrative, not heralding the awakenings, but in a strikingly defensive posture. He acknowledged that “A great part of the country have not received the most favorable thoughts of this affair; and to this day many retain a jealousy concerning it, and prejudice against it.”²⁸⁴ Edwards was critically self-aware of the many enemies and distractors of his ministry. In a sermon *A City on a Hill*, preached in July 1736, Edwards warned his congregation of the scrutiny they will face due to the publicity of the revivals, especially since when the revivals began even the neighboring towns were skeptical and still, many remain so.²⁸⁵ Everywhere Edwards went people were asking how the recent converts at home were behaving so the congregation at Northampton could either live up to their renown, or down to their notoriety.²⁸⁶

Revival and Redemption: Preaching the Redemptive Discourse, 1739

The vivid spiritual drama of the “little revivals” in Northampton and the surrounding towns of the Connecticut River valley impacted Edwards’s theology and view of ministry, perhaps not in any substantive doctrinal way, but upon the subjects of his focus and theological orientation. First, Edwards framed the revivals as a spiritual tug-of-war between the light of God’s excellency and the darkness of Satan’s degeneracy. Edwards would continue to build upon this narrative as he wrote to Benjamin Colman

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 206.

²⁸⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *A City on a Hill* in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 19, Sermons and Discourses: 1734-1738*, ed. M.X. Lesser (New Haven, CY: Yale University Press, 2001), 549-550.

²⁸⁶ *A City on a Hill*, in WJE 19:554.

(1673-1747), the influential pastor of Boston's Brattle Street Church, regarding his uncle's suicide: "Satan seems to be in a great rage, at this extraordinary breaking forth of the work of God. I hope it is because he knows that his has but a short time."²⁸⁷ Perhaps it was Edwards's consciousness of his critics that made him shy away from situating the revivals within an apocalyptic context. But after writing such an effective story of the triumphs and defeats of the revivals and establishing the parameters of the fierce spiritual battle at hand, Edwards would not be so cautious later on in linking his revivalistic fervor with his ever-developing apocalyptic formulations. Second, after having fashioned a revival narrative to fit the times, he sought to understand the awakenings in greater overarching terms commensurate with the higher dimensional workings of God, what he would commonly refer to as the "history of the work of redemption."

Northampton was just one of the many communities that experienced the region's awakenings, but with the publication of *A Faithful Narrative*, the town, along with its minister, became synonymous with the revivals.²⁸⁸ However, within a year the congregation had reverted back to some of the ways and practices before the awakenings including unfair business dealings, a party spirit (along socio-economic lines), and a general desire for worldly comforts and possessions.²⁸⁹ In March 1737 the gallery of the meetinghouse fell during service but miraculously no one was seriously hurt. Edwards saw the accident as a clear warning from God to his backsliding congregation but he was

²⁸⁷ Unpublished Letter to Colman, May 30, 1735, postscript of June 3, 1735 in WJE 4:109.

²⁸⁸ Gura, *Jonathan Edwards America's Evangelical*, 79.

²⁸⁹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 184.

disappointed the incident did not move the hearts of the people toward repentance. Moreover, the construction of the new building actually caused more rifts between rival factions as they jockeyed for hierarchical positions in the proposed seating arrangements.²⁹⁰ Along with a new meetinghouse a new county house was built, physically and symbolically separating the governmental functions of the town from the religious.²⁹¹ John F. Wilson suggests this may have prompted Edwards to a greater awareness for the need of a sermon series that would restore the primacy of religion in the town.²⁹² As the social and spiritual fabric of life in Northampton proved ripe for an ambitious preaching project Edwards embarked on a thirty-part sermon series preached between March and August in 1739.²⁹³ The collection of these sermon manuscripts would become the basis for Edwards's *A History of the Work of Redemption*, first published posthumously by his long-time Scottish correspondent, John Erskine (1721-1803), in 1774.²⁹⁴

The "Redemption Discourse" was notable for its timing as well as its conspicuous eschatological content. Edwards had preached on apocalyptic themes before. His earliest extant sermon on Revelation was Chapter 21:18, initially preached sometime between the Summer of 1722 and Spring of 1723 and later published as *Nothing Upon Earth Can*

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 186.

²⁹¹ Wilson, editor's introduction to WJE 9:4.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid., 5. The sermon series is commonly referred to as the "Redemption Discourse."

²⁹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption. Containing, The Outlines of a Body of Divinity, In a Method entirely new* (Edinburgh, UK: W. Gray, 1774).

*Represent the Glories of Heaven.*²⁹⁵ We can see a young Edwards proceeding cautiously in this sermon. Regarding the “metaphorical” imagery of the New Jerusalem as being made of pure gold and having gates of precious stones he noted, “we are not to imagine that this description is a literal description,” but that St. John’s vision can be understood by “similitudes.”²⁹⁶ In his personal notebooks, however, he wrote his reflections of a more speculative nature. But these thoughts seldom transferred to his sermons; apocalyptic references were used more for dramatic homiletic effect than to espouse theological positions.²⁹⁷ As if to make up for lost time Edwards ceased to be conservative in his apocalyptic proclamations, thrusting the topics of latter-day glory, Antichrist, judgment, millennium, and ultimate redemption onto the pulpit through this sermon series.²⁹⁸

After a period of intense ministerial episodes and experiences, Edwards was finally ready to integrate into his sermons a number of major apocalyptic themes that were found in his personal notebooks. Two that are most pertinent to this study are conversion, as the anthropological corollary to redemption, and the millennium, as the

²⁹⁵ Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:15-16. Dating is based on Thomas A. Shafer’s meticulous work of recreating the timeline of the sermons, manuscripts, notes, and other writings using forensic methods of documentation. Jonathan Edwards, *Nothing Upon Earth Can Represent the Glories of Heaven*, in Works of Jonathan Edwards, *Volume 14, Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 137-138.

²⁹⁶ *Nothing Upon Earth Can Represent the Glories of Heaven*, in WJE 14: 137-138.

²⁹⁷ Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:19.

²⁹⁸ Wilson, editor’s introduction to WJE 9:38-39. A closer examination of the published work, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, will be covered in Chapter 3.

punctuating apocalyptic theological climax to the redemption story.²⁹⁹ Edwards used “history” as a methodological tool to uncover and unveil God’s spiritual plan of redemption through the people, places, and events situated in the lived space of historical reality. Harry S. Stouts writes: “Edwards’ doctrine of redemption, as the central thread of his great project, would not have been well suited to a systematic theology. To be grasped in all its completeness, it had to move out of the polemical confines of the schoolmen and theologians and present itself as a narrative: the greatest story ever told.”³⁰⁰

The “Redemptive Discourse” sermons were derived from a single verse from Isaiah 51:8, “For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation.” Within this verse the themes of conversion, redemption, and the millennium emerged, ready to be analyzed and dissected by Edwards’s intellect and practical ministry experience. Although it is difficult to gauge the impact of these sermons on the congregation as a whole, an eyewitness account provides a glimpse into their efficacy. Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Edwards’s grandson, wrote about the recollections of the late Nehemiah Strong, Esq., a native of Northampton, and professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at Yale College, who in his youth had heard the sermon series:

He was from the beginning deeply interested in the subject. As it advanced, his feelings became more and more engaged. When Mr. Edwards came to a consideration of the final judgment, Mr. Strong said, his own mind was wrought up to such a pitch that he expected without one

²⁹⁹ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 40-49.

³⁰⁰ Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch, preface to the period, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 22, Sermons and Discourses: 1739-1742*, ed. Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 11-12.

thought to the contrary the awful scene to be unfolded on that day and in that place. Accordingly, he waited with the deepest and the most solemn solicitude to hear the trumpet sound and the archangel call; to see the graves open, the dead arise, and the Judge descend in the glory of his Father, with all his holy angels; and was deeply disappointed when the day terminated and left the world in its usual state of tranquility.³⁰¹

Even if Nehemiah Strong's account was not necessarily reflective of the general audience we can still gain a sense of Edwards's purpose for these sermons.

Without the cautious reservations of his earlier writings, here, Edwards made heavy use of apocalyptic imagery. If Edwards could bring even one person closer to the doors of God's eternal justice he thought he was fulfilling his ministerial functions as a watchman, faithfully warning his people to prepare for the day when the trumpet would sound and God's judgment would descend.

Chapter Conclusion

Jonathan Edwards inherited a Puritan eschatological tradition that offered a myriad of interpretational variations on a theme.³⁰² As a young man we see Edwards coming into his own as a natural philosopher, theologian, and biblical exegete but one who had not yet settled on a point of departure in his apocalyptic thought. With his theological jottings in the "Miscellanies" and continuing with the *Notes on the Apocalypse*, Edwards began the intellectual journey of triangulating a controlling theme in his early eschatology. The initial entries in the

³⁰¹ Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, ed. Barbara Miller Solomon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 230-231.

³⁰² Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 59.

“Miscellanies” cover an eclectic range of topics without any systematic outline. But the language of Edwards’s aesthetic sensibilities comes through in the frequency of words like harmony, beauty, proportion, and excellency to describe the theological and biblical constructs he was forming in his writing and preaching.³⁰³ According to Wilson H. Kinnach, *excellency*, in particular, was Edwards’s preferred term for “ultimate ethical/aesthetic authenticity.”³⁰⁴

The language of aesthetics is consistent with many of his early sermons. But in parallel Edwards was populating his *Notes on the Apocalypse* and although the contents did not often make it into the sermons, the spiritual malaise of his congregation in the aftermath of the revival of 1734-35 seemed to have activated the beginnings of a shift from an aesthetics-based orientation to one that made greater use of a dialectical/paradoxical apocalyptic voice.³⁰⁵ This change in tone is reflected most auspiciously in the “Redemption Discourse” preached in 1739, which marks the pivot to the apocalyptic thought of Edwards in the period of the First Great Awakening. In the following chapter, through the interweaving of his writings and preaching with the events of the great revivals, to his dismissal from Northampton, I will cover the contents of Edwards’s renewed apocalyptic focus

³⁰³ Shafer, editor’s introduction to WJE 13:11.

³⁰⁴ Wilson H. Kinnach, “Introduction” to “Yield to God’s Word. Or Be Broken by His Hand,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 25, Sermons and Discourses: 1743-1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 208.

³⁰⁵ This motif will be covered in greater detail in the following chapter.

based on his evolving understanding of the overarching connection between revivalism, conversion, and the ultimate redemption of humankind.

CHAPTER TWO

Edwards's Realized Eschatology: Great Revival to the Great Release, 1740-1750

Edwards grand project through the “Redemption Discourse” was an approach that sought to combine the linear, teleological march of history from creation to consummation with a cyclical, dynamic and creative forces of the spirit.³⁰⁶ In Edwards’s schema of historical-redemptive apocalypticism, history was punctuated by periodic revivalism, all within the backdrop of the cosmic dimensions of an ever-present eschatology. I use the theme of “realized” eschatology in this period of Edwards in a historical-redemptive sense to express the dynamic spirit of Edwards’s apocalyptic thought—as reflected in the work of redemption being actualized through the spirit of revivals, and also as a way to relate the lived-out realities of his apocalypticism within significant episodes of his life. My argument here is that Edwards’s historical-redemptive apocalypticism was made real and personalized throughout his life, mainly through the Great Awakening (revival) and his dismissal from Northampton (release). For Edwards, his apocalyptic thought was never far from his lived reality as he maintained the tension of the “already not yet” all throughout his life.³⁰⁷ It is this future-oriented presentism that made his historical-redemptive apocalypticism a true measure of the habits of his heart.

³⁰⁶ Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 225. Lee’s dispositional ontology sees the infusion of the animating work of the Spirit as the foundation of Edward’s dynamic vision of reality. Lee views Edwards’s sense of history as being both linear and cyclical. In a way I borrow from Lee a dispositional eschatology.

³⁰⁷ This is akin to the ideas of “lived religion,” a field of religious study focusing on embodiment and practice of everyday religion. See David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). For Edwards, his apocalyptic thought always informed his practical theology.

Revival Realized: New England's Great Awakening, 1740-43

The Northampton “little revival” of 1734-35 was, for Edwards, mostly a provincial affair. His preaching of the “Redemption Discourse” in 1739 was in anticipation of a more expansive work of God and by early 1740 Edwards was longing for a renewal of the spirit of revival to touch his congregation once more. In a letter dated February 12, 1740, Edwards wrote to George Whitefield (1714-1770), imploring the famed revivalist preacher to make a stop in Northampton while on his anticipated preaching tour of the colonies later that year.³⁰⁸ Amy Plantinga Pauw observes that the letter is “full of apocalyptic anticipation.”³⁰⁹ In the letter Edwards noted his “refreshment of soul” that “one raised up in the Church of England” would be used so powerfully by God “for the promotion of real vital piety.”³¹⁰ He added words of apocalyptic zeal, proclaiming: “may the gates of hell never be able to prevail against you,” that through Whitefield’s work “the kingdom of Satan shall shake,” and that “the kingdom of Christ, that glorious kingdom of light, holiness, peace and love, shall be established from one end of the earth unto the other!”³¹¹ But Edwards also struck a somber tone, stating: “I am fearful whether you will not be disappointed in New England, and will have less success here than in other places,” and that Whitefield might find the people there more

³⁰⁸ To the Reverend George Whitefield, February 12, 1739/40, in WJE 16:80-81.

³⁰⁹ Pauw, editor’s introduction to WJE 20:3.

³¹⁰ To the Reverend George Whitefield, February 12, 1739/40, in WJE 80-81.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

hardened.³¹² Edwards's concerns were not allayed over the course of the year as in an October 9 letter to Eleazar Wheelock (1711-1779), pastor and revivalist in Lebanon Crank, CT, he asked for prayers with an admission that for both he and his congregation, "It is a sorrowfully dull and dead time with us."³¹³

Although Northampton was in a spiritually dry state Edwards never wavered from his belief that revivalism was God's preferred method of ushering in a new age of vital piety. Not only did he experience the "heat" of faith during the Northampton revival, he was also encouraged by news of revivals in the Dutch-Reformed circles of Theodorus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747), William Tennent Sr. (1673-1746), and his sons, Gilbert (1703-1764) and William (1705-1777) in the Mid-Atlantic region. He was even aware of similar revivals in Germany under August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) and Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), of stirrings in the British Isles and elsewhere around the globe.³¹⁴ On June 1, 1740, Edwards wrote to Josiah Willard (1681-1756), secretary of the province and a source for world-wide evangelical affairs, expressing his anticipation of God's glorious work in the church and inquiring about revivals he had heard about in Prussia and asking about the latest updates on Francke's Halle, the East Indies under Danish missionaries, and about places as remote as Muscovy.³¹⁵ Interestingly, Edwards was well-informed about the revivals in England but

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ To the Reverend Eleazar Wheelock, October 9, 1740, in WJE 16:85.

³¹⁴ Stout, preface to the period, in WJE 22:24.

³¹⁵ To the Sec. Josiah Willard, June 1, 1740, in WJE 16:83.

kept a respectful distance from the revivalistic Arminianism of John (1703-1791) and his brother, Charles Wesley (1707-1788).

George Whitefield, though Anglican and closely connected with Wesley's Methodism, was still staunchly Reformed. He was drawing enthusiastic crowds everywhere he preached. Ever a performer and tireless promoter, a year earlier Whitefield had made a hugely successful whirlwind tour through Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and down the southern colonies en route to Savannah, Georgia where the Wesleys had earlier established a missionary foothold.³¹⁶ Edwards sought Whitefield's help in revitalizing his congregation. But Edwards's influence on Whitefield and the English revivals was more significant than perhaps he realized. Whitefield's first published sermon, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus* appeared in 1737, the same year Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative* came to print in London.³¹⁷ These complementary publications provided the early blueprint for the upcoming awakenings in America. Whitefield's sermon made a distinction between the outward appearance of conversion versus the inward change necessary for a truly regenerated, born again person.³¹⁸ Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative* showed what could be

³¹⁶ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 45-54.

³¹⁷ George Whitefield, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus* (London: n.p., 1737). See also Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 38.

³¹⁸ Douglas L. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 147.

possible when there was a critical mass of souls open to the New Birth. It gained a wide and appreciative audience in England, furthering the nation's revival efforts.

While Edwards had not yet developed the apocalyptic lens with which to describe the revival of 1734-35, Isaac Watts (1674-1748), the famous hymn writer and active evangelical minister and co-laborer, John Guyse (1680-1761), did not hesitate in endowing it with millennial significance. In the preface to the first edition of *A Faithful Narrative* the two ministers urged the readers to take notice “when he begins to accomplish any of his promises concerning the latter days,” and “how easy it will be for our blessed Lord to make a full accomplishment of all his predictions concerning his kingdom, and to spread his dominion from sea to sea through all the nations of the earth.”³¹⁹ Thomas Kidd writes that *A Faithful Narrative* became “both a commodity in the Atlantic world's markets and a vehicle for spreading the eschatological revival.”³²⁰ John Wesley was also affected by reading *A Faithful Narrative* and published his own abridged version for the edification of the Methodists.³²¹ Even Whitefield's innovation of open field preaching was adopted from the itinerant preacher, Howell Harris (1714-1773) of Wales, a close associate of John Wesley, whose ministry was impacted by reading *A Faithful Narrative*.³²²

³¹⁹ Isaac Watts and John Guyse, preface to the first edition of *Faithful Narrative*, in WJE 4:131-132. See also Ava Chamberlain, editor's introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 18, The "Miscellanies,"* Nos. 501-832, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 131-132.

³²⁰ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 22.

³²¹ Mardsen, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 173.

³²² Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 44.

When Whitefield finally came to Boston in the Fall of 1740 at the invitation of Benjamin Colman, who was instrumental in the publication of Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative*, it seemed as though the spirit of the Trans-Atlantic revivals was coming full circle. Immediately Whitefield began to attract sizable crowds.³²³ His final sermon in Boston on October 12, 1740 at the Common drew an audience of an estimated 20,000, quite possibly the largest crowd ever assembled in the colonies at the time.³²⁴ Whitefield then traveled westward and made the long-awaited visit to Northampton. In the aftermath of his Sunday morning message that day he wrote of his venerable host:

Good Mr. Edwards wept during the whole time of exercise. The people were equally affected; and, in the afternoon, the power increased yet more. . . . Oh, that my soul may be refreshed with the joyful news, that Northampton people have recovered their first love; that the Lord has revived his work in their souls, and caused them to do their first works [*Revelation 2:4–5*]!³²⁵

That Whitefield would use a rebuke and encouragement to the church in Ephesus from Revelation as a reference text for his sermon in Northampton was fitting. The congregation was already primed by Edwards through the “Redemption Discourse” sermons in 1739 to receive the apocalyptic passage from the perspective of latter-day recipients. During the four days Whitefield was in Northampton there was a renewal of the old revival spirit that Edwards had anticipated when he wrote his letter of invitation to

³²³ Noll, *America's God*, 22.

³²⁴ Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:48. Pauw, editor's introduction to WJE 20:3.

³²⁵ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* (London: Banner of Truth, 1960), 477. The passage in Revelation is addressed to the Church of Ephesus with a rebuke for having forsaken their first love.

the “Grand Itinerant” with millennial overtones: “I hope this is the dawning of a day of God's mighty power and glorious grace to the world of mankind.”³²⁶ In recalling Whitefield’s visit a few years later, Edwards noted “there was an appearance of a glorious progress of the work of God upon the hearts of sinners in conviction and conversion.”³²⁷ He could even count among the many saved from Whitefield’s visit a few of his own children.³²⁸ However, Edwards also felt some unease toward Whitefield and sent him off with a warning to be careful about judging unscrupulously those whom he considered unconverted.³²⁹ But overall the revivals were a huge success. By the time Whitefield wrapped up his itinerancy through New England and entered New York he had visited over 41 towns and given over 100 sermons over a period of 46 days.³³⁰

Rationalistic Enthusiast or Enthusiastic Rationalist?

The Great Awakening that came to New England starting in 1740 was far greater in reach, degree, and scope than Edwards could have imagined. But with the successes came the excesses. The evangelical revival tradition Edwards had inherited from his father and grandfather sought to combine a reasonable Christianity with the heat of faith,

³²⁶ To the Reverend George Whitefield, February 12, 1739/40, in WJE 16:80.

³²⁷ To the Reverend Thomas Prince, December 12, 1743, in WJE 16:119.

³²⁸ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 87.

³²⁹ Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Founding Spiritual Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 128. Edwards exchanged several letters with the Rev. Thomas Clap where in defending Whitefield’s ministry, Edwards made known his warning to Whitefield, although the manner in which Rev. Clap heard of it was disputed. See the letter dated May 20, 1745, To the Reverend Thomas Clap, in WJE 4:163-172.

³³⁰ Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 140.

what Bruce Kuklick refers to as a synthesis of “logic and tears.”³³¹ These awakenings, however, produced an emotionalism that was unprecedented and Whitefield was actively pushing the boundaries of the norms of religious decorum established by previous revivals. Not wanting to lose any momentum of the spiritual upheaval all around New England, Whitefield convinced Gilbert Tennent, a fellow New Birth revivalist from New Jersey, to continue the trail of his itinerant preaching.³³² Tennent’s fiery preaching style and uncompromising call for a genuine conversion experience, especially amongst the clergy, further fueled both the awakenings as well as its controversies.³³³ Some of these meetings tended toward excessive emotionalism and this “enthusiasm,” as the critics of revivals called it, was cause for concern among the more conservative factions of the ministry.³³⁴

The criticism of enthusiasm increased with the emergence of upstart young itinerant preachers who were in part motivated by a sense of apocalyptic urgency.³³⁵ The one who received the most notoriety was James Davenport (1716-1757), a Yale graduate

³³¹ Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 44-45.

³³² Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 67, 92-93, 97.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 87. Tennent’s most famous sermon challenged the dry and ineffective ministries of clergy who themselves lacked converting grace, see Gilbert Tennent, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1742).

³³⁴ Edwin S. Gaustad, “Society and the Great Awakening in New England,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (October 1954): 573. Gaustad notes that in Boston the ratio of pro-revival New Light ministers to Old Light opposition was three to one. Interestingly, among the three Old Lights, two were of the Mather line (Samuel Mather, son of Cotton Mather, and Mather Byles, grandson of Increase).

³³⁵ Lee Eric Schmidt, “‘A Second and Glorious Reformation’: The New Light Extremism of Andrew Croswell,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (April 1986): 218.

and the grandson of the founder of New Haven. Davenport was prone to calling out more established ministers as unconverted and his bouts of frenzied fanaticism, ostentatious histrionics, and an unconventional, emotionally-charged preaching style provided much fodder for the opposition to the awakenings.³³⁶ His spiritual excesses reached a crescendo in 1743 in New London, CT, when he led a group of young men in burning books; the next day they set ablaze jewelry, wigs, and clothing in a bonfire as a sign of protest against impious ministers and general worldliness.³³⁷ Davenport quickly recanted and disavowed his actions, pleading something akin to temporary insanity, thereby putting an abrupt halt to his radical separatist movement.³³⁸ Yet this extremist stream of revivalism never disappeared, sustained primarily by Davenport's staunchest defender and irrepressible spirit, Andrew Crosswell (1709-1785), who continued to be a thorn to both anti-revivalists and moderate New Lights for decades to come.³³⁹ But the damage Davenport and his cohorts caused had long-lasting ramifications for the awakenings as the optics of an enthusiasm gone awry had become already irrevocable.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Robert E. Cray, "More Light on a New Light: James Davenport's Religious Legacy, Eastern Long Island, 1740-1840," *New York History* 73, no. 1 (January 1992): 5.

³³⁷ Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf, "James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London," *The Journal of American History* 70, no. 3 (December 1983): 556. The books purportedly included works by classical Puritan authors such as Matthew Henry, Richard Sibbes, Increase Mather, and even the well-respected contemporary pro-revivalist, Benjamin Colman.

³³⁸ James Davenport, *Confession and Retractions in The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion 1740-1745*, ed. Richard L. Bushman (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 53-55.

³³⁹ Schmidt, "The New Light Extremism of Andrew Crosswell," 222-224.

³⁴⁰ Stout and Onuf, "James Davenport and the Great Awakening," 557.

As the most notable apologist of revivalism with a reputation for a fair-minded seriousness, Edwards took on the task of adjudicating between the widening factions of pro-revivalist New Lights and the anti-revivalist Old Lights in New England congregationalism (similar schisms emerged with the Presbyterian New Sides versus the Old Sides in the Middle Colonies).³⁴¹ Edwards was already concerned about the radical nature of the revivals well before the public relations disaster of James Davenport. On September 10, 1741, Edwards gave the Commencement address at Yale where his *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of God* enumerated nine negative signs of a work of God. While acknowledging their harmfulness, Edwards nevertheless argued that the presence of these factors did not necessarily negate what was happening during the revivals by outlining five positive marks that could distinguish a genuine work of God.³⁴² Edwards offered personal examples from Northampton. In comparing his congregation's current state with the "little revival" from six year ago, Edwards wrote: "The work of God that has been carried on there this year, has been much purer than that which was wrought there six years before," that it was "more purely spiritual; freer from natural and corrupt mixtures, and anything savoring of enthusiastic wildness and extravagance," the main result being that it "has wrought more by deep humiliation and abasement before God and men."³⁴³

³⁴¹ John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), 137-140.

³⁴² Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:53-55. Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741).

³⁴³ *The Distinguishing Marks*, in WJE 4:270.

The Yale address was published later that year and in the preface, William Cooper (1694-1743), Benjamin Colman's co-worker at the Brattle Street Church in Boston, likened Edwards to "a burning and shining light in the golden candlestick where Christ has placed him [Revelation 1:20]."³⁴⁴ Cooper evidently viewed Edwards as a prophetic voice against growing opposition to the revivals. In the address Edwards challenged his hearers of the deeper and far weightier implications of opposing the revivals by stating in millennial terms: "There is another coming of Christ, a spiritual coming, to set up his kingdom in the world, that is as much spoken of in Scripture prophecy as that first coming of Christ was, and that has been long expected by the church of God; that we have reason to think, from what is said of it, will be, in many respects, parallel with the other."³⁴⁵ Edwards was careful to state that it was unclear whether this period of revival signaled "the beginning of that great coming of Christ to set up his kingdom." What was clear to Edwards was that it was of the same spirit. Paraphrasing Christ's own words, Edwards charged those who stood opposed to the Awakenings: "He that is not with us is against us."³⁴⁶

For Edwards, the heart of the matter of the revivals was whether the mechanism of conversion was consistent with the way God intended for salvation history. Toward this end Edwards turned to his thoughts on the sermon series he had preached a few years

³⁴⁴ William Cooper, preface to *The Distinguishing Marks*, in WJE 4:225. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 142.

³⁴⁵ *The Distinguishing Marks*, in WJE 4:271.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 272-273. From Matthew 12:30, Luke 11:23, where Jesus says, "He that is not with me is against me..." (AV). Edwards changed the first-person singular pronoun "me" to the plural "us," see n3.

earlier on the history of the work of redemption. In *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*, a work written when the awakenings began to wane, Edwards put forth an argument that since God's purpose in creation was its ultimate redemption, *a fortiori* the revivals were God's preferred method of accomplishing that cause.³⁴⁷ Although Edwards had tried his best to give a biblically-sound, rational defense of the revivals, for him the evidence that evangelical dispensation was forcefully advancing the kingdom toward the end of the age was abundantly clear.

Edwards's defense of the revivals was mainly an appeal to a new epistemological understanding based on Lockean psychology of the unity of the soul's rational and affective capabilities.³⁴⁸ In *Some Thoughts* Edwards summarized his position: "I humbly conceive that the affections of the soul are not properly distinguished from the will, as though they were two faculties in the soul. All acts of the affections of the soul are in some sense acts of the will, and all acts of the will are acts of the affections."³⁴⁹ Against the rationalists, who subsumed all affective sensibilities under reason, Edwards used his own life experiences to demonstrate the unitive functions of reason and the affections. He even went as far as declaring that true virtue or holiness "has its seat chiefly in the heart, rather than in the head" and that it "consists chiefly in holy affections."³⁵⁰ But for the rationalists Edwards had overstepped the boundaries of reason when he used the near

³⁴⁷ Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:71-72. Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1742).

³⁴⁸ Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:66.

³⁴⁹ *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, in WJE 4:297.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 297-298.

mystical ecstasies his wife, Sarah, had experienced during the revivals as evidence that holy affections of a deeply spiritual nature could be mistaken for enthusiasm.³⁵¹ Despite the criticism, Edwards's ultimate confidence in the legitimacy of the revivals lay not in any new insights into human psychology, but in his belief in the redemptive narrative of God.

The contents of *Some Thoughts* placed Edwards in an uncomfortable spotlight where he drew sharp criticism from an emerging Old Light coalition headed by the epitome of dusty, rationalistic religion, Charles Chauncy (1705-1787) of Boston's First Church, who with his rigid jawline and square shoulders might qualify as having earned one of American history's most fitting nicknames, Old Brick.³⁵² Chauncy took on the role of lead opponent of the revivals with a treatise, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (1743), which was mostly a staid disputation of Edwards's *Some Thoughts*, along with testimonial evidence he had gathered on the excesses of the revivals.³⁵³ But one peculiar statement stands out as it relates to the possibility that Edwards's supposed embrace of enthusiasm impinged upon even his eschatology. In what could have been literally an obscure footnote of the awakenings offers a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse into the world of Edwards's private/public handling of his

³⁵¹ Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:70.

³⁵² Edward M. Griffin, *Old Brick: Charles Chauncy of Boston, 1705-1787* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 10. The First Church building was sometimes referred to as "the old brick building" and the name became associated with Chauncy.

³⁵³ Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1743).

apocalyptic teachings. Chauncy wrote that in a letter he had received from a “worthy gentleman” concerning Edwards, it made the following assertion:

I am surprised at his long labour to prove the Millennium shall begin in America—he has been so modest as to conceal the reason of this; but it may easily be gathered from what he has often said to private persons, viz. that he doubted not, the Millennium began when there was such an Awakening at Northampton 8 years past—So that salvation is gone forth from Northampton, and Northampton must have the praise of being first brought into it.”³⁵⁴

Assuming Chauncy was honest about the anonymous source of the letter, the accusation does not sound too far-fetched. This “worthy gentleman” seems to have been privy to Edwards’s inner circle, as he stated it can “easily be gathered” from what Edwards had said *often*, in private. Furthermore, it suggested Edwards was being *modest* in his public proclamations about America being the probable location of the beginnings of the millennium. For in fact, Edwards, in private, was to have said without a doubt that the millennium had already begun in Northampton eight years earlier! The passage in *Some Thoughts* that Chauncy attacked came with a subheading, “The Millennium Probably To Dawn in America,” and is worth citing in extended form (highlights, bolded and italicized, are mine):

Tis not unlikely that this work of God's Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind. If we consider how long since the things foretold, as what should precede this great event, have been accomplished; and how long this event has been expected by the church of God, and thought to be nigh by the most eminent men of God in the

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 372 n. As an interesting aside, Chauncy adds a statement from Increase Mather to show how opinions differ on such matters. Mather wrote that during the glorious times promised to the church on earth, America will be hell!

church; and withal consider what the state of things now is, and has for a considerable time been, in the church of God and world of mankind, we can't reasonably think otherwise, than that the beginning of this great work of God must be near. ***And there are many things that make it probable that this work will begin in America...*** The latter is but newly discovered; it was formerly wholly unknown, from age to age, and is as it were now but newly created: it has been till of late wholly the possession of Satan, the church of God having never been in it, as it has been in the other continent, from the beginning of the world. This new world is probably now discovered, that the new and most glorious state of God's church on earth might commence there; that ***God might in it begin a new world in a spiritual respect, when he creates the new heavens and new earth...***³⁵⁵

This passage is significant for many reasons, the foremost being it is the first instance of Edwards publishing a controversial apocalyptic thought previously confined only in his private notes.³⁵⁶ Written around the same time as *Some Thoughts*, Edwards wrote in his "Blank Bible" notebook a commentary on 1 Kings 18:44 that gave a rather obscure scriptural basis for his peculiar millennial speculation:

The rain, after the great drought, came on Israel from a little cloud that came out of the west from beyond the sea. So probably that great outpouring of the Spirit that shall be in the latter days, so often compared to plentiful showers of rain on the dry [land], will arise in and from America. That drought continued three years and six months, or a time, times, and an half [Revelation 12:14], answerable to the time of the continuance of the church's trouble and spiritual drought before the glorious times.³⁵⁷

Edwards linked the little cloud from the west with the America of the Western hemisphere and even correlated the length of the drought to the "a time, times, and

³⁵⁵ *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival*, in WJE 4:353-354. Highlights mine.

³⁵⁶ Stein, editor's introduction, WJE 5:29.

³⁵⁷ "Blank Bible," note on 1 Kings, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 24, The "Blank Bible,"* ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 385.

an half’ of Revelation 12:14. He buttressed the western-centric origin of the latter-day spirit by noting: “The king of Israel also at that time came in his chariot from Carmel to Jezreel, which was from the west to the east,” and connected this to a prophetic passage in Hosea, writing that “The church of God is called by the name of Jezreel in a prophecy of the glorious gospel days.”³⁵⁸ Edwards sustained the West to East motif in *Some Thoughts*, adding a passage from Ezekiel 47, which he interpreted in similarly apocalyptic terms.

The same seems also to be represented by the course of the waters of the sanctuary, *Ezekiel 47*, which was from West to East; which waters undoubtedly represent the Holy Spirit, in the progress of his saving influences, in the latter ages of the world: for 'tis manifest that the whole of those last chapters of Ezekiel are concerning the glorious state of the church that shall then be.³⁵⁹

From these samples, we see an Edwards displaying a legerdemain of cross referencing passages of the Bible to let scripture interpret scripture, even to the point of stretching the limits of biblical hermeneutics.

Some Thoughts was significant in that it was Edwards’s first published work that revealed his strong eschatological orientation. It captured Edwards in his most unguarded millennial stance; he put into print some of his most speculative apocalyptic ideas. Perhaps what most confounded Chauncy and other Old Light critics was Edwards’s self-elevation of his role in the millennium by pointing to New England as its incipient epicenter.

³⁵⁸ “Blank Bible,” note on 1 Kings, in WJE 24:385.

³⁵⁹ *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival*, in WJE 4:357-358.

And if we may suppose that this glorious work of God shall begin in any part of America, I think, if we consider the circumstances of the settlement of New England, it must needs appear the most likely of all American colonies, to be the place whence this work shall principally take its rise. And if these things are so, it gives us more abundant reasons to hope that *what is now seen in America, and especially in New England, may prove the dawn of that glorious day:* and the very uncommon and wonderful circumstances and events of this work, seem to me strongly to argue that God intends it as the beginning or forerunner of something vastly great. *I have thus long insisted on this point,* because if these things are so, it greatly manifests how much it behooves us to encourage and promote this work, and how dangerous it will be to forbear so to do.”³⁶⁰

The controversies surrounding Edwards’s millennial statements belied earlier precedents. To be certain Edwards was not advancing anything new. Many Puritan forbearers and contemporaries had expressed similar stirrings of millennial optimism.³⁶¹ And many more believed to a certain extent in American exceptionalism. Cotton Mather’s magisterial if understudied *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), serves as a prime example.³⁶² In it Mather mythologized, “This at last is the spot of *earth*, which the God of heaven *spied out* for the seat of such *evangelical*, and *ecclesiastical*, and very remarkable transactions, as require to be made an history; here ‘twas that our blessed Jesus intended *a resting place*, must I say?”³⁶³ The language of *spied out* harkens to the Israelites and the

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 358. Highlights mine.

³⁶¹ Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:26n1. Stein cites a Boston minister who wrote: “Let the Guardian Angels carry the News to Heaven of the numerous Converts; the *Millennium* is begun, Christ dwells with Men on Earth.” From a letter of John Moorhead to John Willison, July 30, 1742; in Julius H. Tuttle, “The Glasgow-Weekly-History, 1743,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 53 (1919-20): 213.

³⁶² Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1702).

³⁶³ Excerpted from Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana, or the Ecclesiastical History of New England* (Hartford, CT: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), 45.

Promised Land and *a resting place* of Jesus could be interpreted as either a general reference to the blessedness associated with Christ's presence or more likely it was a reference to millennial Sabbatism, the idea that the biblical day of Genesis represents a thousand years and that after six thousand years, the seventh day will usher in the thousand years of millennial glory and Sabbath rest. Indeed, Avihu Zakai argues that Puritan eschatology was not based on a "Genesis type" of migration as in the case of Spain, Portugal, and Protestant England (Anglican settlement in Virginia) where a chosen nation engages in a peaceful migration to fill the earth with the gospel.³⁶⁴ Rather it was upon an "Exodus type" of apocalyptic migration that was a judgment against and a wholesale rejection of the old order.³⁶⁵ Accordingly, writes Zakai, America became "a sacred place" and "a refuge for God's saints who felt obliged to flee into the wilderness of New England because of God's impending judgment on the old, sinful world."³⁶⁶

Cotton Mather surely believed that the wilderness of New England was a refuge for the saints. Joseph Mede, in *Clavis Apocalyptica* (originally published in 1627, printed as *The Key to the Revelation* in 1643 and 1650), argued that America was to be excluded from the future saving promises of God because it was the seat of the hell of *Gog* and *Magog* in Revelation Chapter 20, the place whence forth Satan will gather a final army to

³⁶⁴ Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 10.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

attack and surround the camp of the saints.³⁶⁷ According to Reiner Smolinski, the work did not receive attention from colonial Puritans until the 1690s when there was a surge of eschatological interest.³⁶⁸ Cotton Mather was at the forefront of this apocalyptic revival and as the first colonist on record to call himself “an American,” it was unsurprising that he would be the one to offer a rebuttal.³⁶⁹ In the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Mather made a reference to Mede’s interpretation about America, stating “all this is but conjecture.”³⁷⁰ Mather’s close friend, Judge Samuel Sewall, was even more defensive. In his millennial treatise, *Phaenomena quaedam Apocalyptica* (1703), Sewall could not accept Mede’s conjecture that America would be excluded from millennial glory, writing: “So that what cometh to pass in the New World, must be referred to some Prophetie. And to make America to be the whole and only Object of the Curses denounced against Gog and Magog; and to shut them out from all Promised Blessings; is altogether Unscriptural and Unreasonable.”³⁷¹ Furthermore, echoing a question posed earlier by Dr. William Twisse (1578-1646) to Mede, Sewall asked rhetorically regarding America: “Why may

³⁶⁷ Reiner Smolinski, General Introduction to “The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: The Millennial Impulse in Early American Literature,” ed. Reiner Smolinski, *Electronic Texts in American Studies* 27 (1998): x. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/27>

³⁶⁸ Smolinski, General Introduction, x.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., xi. Mather wrote: “I that am an *American*” in the “Problema Theologicum” (1703). See “Problema Theologicum,” 412.

³⁷⁰ Mather, *Magnalia*, 46. From the 1853 edition.

³⁷¹ Sewall, *Phaenomena*, 38.

not that be the place of New Jerusalem?” and as if that was too bold, qualifying it with, “Why may not *New-Spain* be the place of *New Jerusalem*?”³⁷²

Compared to Cotton Mather and Samuel Sewall, Edwards’s speculations regarding America’s special role in the millennium was rather restrained. It is likely Edwards read Mather’s take on American exceptionalism and was probably at least familiar with Sewall’s exaltation of America’s place in the latter-day timeline.³⁷³ So if Edwards’s arguments in *Some Thoughts* were not novel, why was there so much criticism? Edwards, of course, was writing in a different historical context. After the events of the Great Awakening there were doubts from critics as to the genuineness or even to the durability of the revivals. Although Edwards’s ultimate intention was to give glory to God for the revivals, his Old Light enemies thought he was inviting self-glory. Most likely Edwards’s America-centric millennialism would not have elicited such a critical response had he not been the leading figure of New Light evangelical revivalism. The excerpts the critics attacked, however, were not those of a pamphleteering polemicist, being of much more substantive weight than the common tropes of apocalyptic rhetorical flourish. They were instead carefully wrought ruminations on scripture. Edwards argued unequivocally from Isaiah 60:9, contending that the latter days

³⁷² Ibid., 2. Dr. William Twisse, a theologian who resided at one time in New England, asked Joseph Mede whether America could be the New Jerusalem, to which Mede replied that New Jerusalem was to remain in Judea. Instead of America being the New Jerusalem it was more likely to be “the seat of hell.” See Smolinski, “Israel Redivivus,” 369-370.

³⁷³ Edwards’s father, Timothy, owned a copy of Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*. Edwards referred to Mather’s *Magnalia* in “A Letter to the Author of the Pamphlet Called an Answer to the Hampshire Narrative” (1737) and in a letter to Thomas Foxcroft in 1749. See Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 139n6.

would begin in some remote isle: “I can’t think that anything else can be here intended but America,” and that, “this prophecy therefore seems plainly to point out America, as the first fruits of that glorious day.”³⁷⁴

America was for Edwards as likely a venue for the birth pangs that would signal the emergence of the new heavens and new earth and he justified this view mainly through scripture. Using the typologies of Leah and Rachel (the older and the younger), Judah, Joseph and Benjamin (offspring), Edwards laid out the case juxtaposing the old continent (where Christ was slain) with God’s intention for the new continent.³⁷⁵ God’s “manner of working” is to do a work where there was no foundation, of using the desert-like wilderness, the newest, youngest, weakest, the last place of church planting, so that the last shall be first—after this in-depth biblical exegesis he concluded: “And many other parallel Scriptures might be mentioned.”³⁷⁶ Given the scriptural basis of America and New England’s sacred role in the overall schema of God’s salvation history, Edward’s warning to the distractors of the revivals was that it would be “dangerous” to oppose such a work.³⁷⁷

The representative excerpts highlighted above embody many elements of Edwards’s emerging apocalypticism—esoteric typology, imaginative use of symbolism,

³⁷⁴ *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival*, in WJE 4:353-354. See also Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:27-28.

³⁷⁵ *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival*, in WJE 4: 356.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 358.

heavy-handed spiritualism, all wrapped up under the rubric of the grand redemptive story of God. Edwards's arguments and explanations in *Some Thoughts*, particularly in Part IV, are at certain points prosaic, other times fantastical, some observations revealing his creativity and originality, others enigmatic and sensationally hyper-spiritualized. The biblical parallels are often merely speculative at best, downright confounding at worst. As was inevitable, the opposition pounced quickly. The revivals had already been under attack. In Connecticut anti-itinerancy laws were enacted to prevent disruptive itinerant preachers like Davenport from causing further chaos.³⁷⁸ A critic of Edwards's *Some Thoughts* wrote scathingly: "Mr. Edwards's late book...contains an account of greater disorders, delusions, errors and extravagances among the subjects of the late work, than the opposers thought of, or could have believed on any lower authority."³⁷⁹

Edwards, for his part, thought he was being misunderstood. Their main mistake was conflating what he meant by "the glorious work of God," that is, the revivals, with the "glorious times" of the millennium itself.³⁸⁰ If read carefully, Edwards did distinguish between the revivals as the forerunners to the millennium and the actual millennial time of peace and prosperity. But given the effusive language and the ambiguous nature of a typical Puritan's millennial understanding—which as we have seen was wide and varied—Edwards should not have been surprised at the confusion, either created deliberately by his critics or otherwise. Edwards was especially defensive and sensitive

³⁷⁸ Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 300. The "Act for regulating Abuses and correcting Disorders in Ecclesiastical Affairs" passed in May of 1742.

³⁷⁹ Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:80. Quoted from *Boston Evening Post*, June 13, 1743.

³⁸⁰ Gerald McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 51.

about the accusation made by Chauncy and others that he had proclaimed the millennium was to begin in America and even that it had already begun in Northampton. Edwards vehemently denied this in a letter to William McCulloch (1691-1771) of Scotland, often expressing frustration over the tendency for his millennial writings to be misconstrued by many. Edwards wrote:

It has been slanderously reported and printed concerning me, that I have often said that the millennium was already begun, and that it began at Northampton; a doctor of divinity in New England has ventured to publish this report to the world, from a single person, who is concealed and kept behind the curtain; but the report is very diverse from what I have ever said. Indeed, I have often said, as I say now, that I looked upon the late wonderful revivals of religion as *forerunners of those glorious times so often prophesied of in the Scripture*, and that this was the first dawning of that light, and beginning of that work which, in the progress and issue of it, would at last bring on the church's latter-day glory: but there are many that know that I have from time to time added, that there would probably be many sore conflicts and terrible convulsions, and many changes, revivings and intermissions, and returns of dark clouds, and threatening appearances, before this work shall have subdued the world, and Christ's kingdom shall be everywhere established and settled in peace, which will be the lengthening of the millennium, or day of the church's peace, rejoicing and triumph on earth, so often spoken of....³⁸¹

Edwards's rendering of the revivals in *Some Thoughts* and the aftermath of the controversies surrounding its millennial content suggests a number of factors in the development of colonial apocalyptic thought. First, from the 1690s, leading up to the Great Awakening in the 1740s, there was an increasingly charged atmosphere of millennial expectation. While Edwards refrained from apocalyptic sentiments in describing the "little revival" in the 1730s, Edwards's enthusiasm in sharing his

³⁸¹ To the Reverend William McCulloch, March 5, 1743/4, in WJE 16:135-136. Highlights mine.

millennial speculations in *Some Thoughts* coincided with a reading audience more attuned to such thinking. Edwards seemed to have hit an apocalyptic nerve. Second, the sheer reach of the Great Awakening seemed to have rapidly disseminated apocalyptic ideas to a broader audience. Third, in the rather remarkable footnote from Chauncy regarding the “worthy gentleman” who provided inside information on Edwards, the issue of the public/private dichotomy of Edwards’s eschatology was exposed.

These points are all closely related. The historical record may show how many sermons on Revelation Edwards preached, all the polemical pamphlets, treatises, letters, correspondences and theological works, even the private notebooks and manuscripts on apocalyptic themes. But what is lacking are the “hidden transcripts” of everyday transactions during Edwards’s countless personal encounters, visitations, counseling sessions, church gatherings, small-group meetings, and private conversations where these topics must have come to light.³⁸² Although it is not possible to recreate these hidden data, the implication of Chauncy’s received letter is that after the Great Awakening Edwards was more willing than ever to engage with even his most controversial eschatological opinions. This suggests at least his willingness to expose more of his daily hidden transcripts to the wider population.

Could it be because there was increased demand for such speculations? There are clues that this might have been the case. At the very least, Chauncy’s footnote provides

³⁸² The concept of “hidden transcripts” as a vehicle for the subversion of power structures is applied in the case of the anonymous letter writer but I expand the utility to include material culture that usually remain unexposed. See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

circumstantial evidence that Edwards's apocalyptic thoughts, both public and private, were of great interest. Edwards's *Some Thoughts* opened him up to criticism from both the New Light radicals, who thought he was too critical of the extreme elements of enthusiasm in the revivals, and the Old Light rationalists, who felt Edwards had betrayed his rationalistic foundations in favor of an unbridled revivalism bordering on fanaticism.³⁸³ Was Edwards a rationalistic enthusiast or an enthusiastic rationalist? Edwards attempted to stay the middle course but as is often the case in war, the worst position is to be in no-man's land taking fire from both sides. But *Some Thoughts* was more than a mere apologetic of the revival. It was a bold departure from Edwards's previous conservatism regarding the apocalyptic. The work began to reveal Edwards's developing historical-redemptive apocalypticism, uncovering a prophetic thinker already preparing to move beyond the provincial controversies of the revivals onto a national and even international stage.

The Awakening Sermon and Apocalypticism

The Great Awakening was a cultural and spiritual touchstone for New England with far-reaching repercussions for the future. While the pamphleteering exchange between Edwards and Chauncy was typical between dissenting clergymen, the controversies at hand—revivalism and millennialism—were brought to greater light. Edwards was at the center of the convergence between the two subjects and he was at the forefront of pushing the agenda of an emerging revivalistic apocalypticism. Through the

³⁸³ Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:80

Great Awakening the occupation with Revelation and the apocalyptic, which seemed to have been a New England Puritan eccentricity, found a larger audience throughout the colonies.³⁸⁴ It was near the peak of the awakenings when Edwards preached his most famous sermon—*Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God* (1741).³⁸⁵ After Whitefield’s visit to Northampton, Edwards responded to the *zeitgeist* of the revivals created by the “Grand Itinerant” by adopting a more extemporaneous, performative preaching style.³⁸⁶ But oratorical method was not the only thing Edwards changed. Harry Stout notes, “Edwards shifted his content decisively from heaven to hell.”³⁸⁷ Edwards’s entries in his notebooks during this period corroborate the increased attention to hell and it is also reflected in the number of sermons he preached on it in 1741.³⁸⁸

This is consistent with Edwards’s more general pivot during this period from the language of aesthetics to the apocalyptic. In 1739, out of approximately 30 sermons on record, Edwards did not once utilize a text from Revelation. In 1741, out of 64 sermons on record, 8 were based on Revelation along with 3 others that dealt primarily with apocalyptic themes.³⁸⁹ Edwards began to build upon his apocalyptic preaching repertoire

³⁸⁴ Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial themes in American thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 13.

³⁸⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741).

³⁸⁶ Stout, preface to the period, in WJE 22:31.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 225. Winiarski identifies nine sermons about hell preached in 1741.

³⁸⁹ Based on Thomas Shafer’s Sermon Index in the Works of Jonathan Edwards Online.

well in advance of that fateful day on July 8, 1741 when he caused a stir in Enfield with his hell-fire *Sinners* sermon. Edwards preached his first Whitefield-styled awakening sermon in December 1740 with “Sinners in Zion,” where he admonished those professors—full church members—who did not fear God and remained unsaved: “However senseless they are now, they will hereafter be sensible of the awful greatness of God and that it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands.”³⁹⁰ As if field testing the indelible imagery of *Sinners*, Edwards covered the themes of falling into God’s wrathful hands and the torments of hell. In April 1741, Edwards preached a sermon titled, “Importunate Prayer for Millennial Glory,” based on Isaiah 62:6-7, a favored text he alluded to in a letter to fellow revivalist Eleazar Wheelock a year earlier and before Whitefield’s New England tour.³⁹¹ In the sermon Edwards pleaded with his congregation not only to pray but to prepare for Christ’s impending judgment because Revelation 16:15 prophesies that he will come as a thief, the trajectory of the end times will not be progressively positive, but that it will feature “very great and general commotions and overturnings in which professing Christians will doubtless have great trials.”³⁹²

It is evident that in the crucial months before the preaching of *Sinners*, Edwards’s apocalyptic focus was catered to revivalistic concerns. Edwards initially preached *Sinners* at Northampton in June but there is no indication it signified anything out of the

³⁹⁰ “Sinners in Zion,” in WJE 22:269.

³⁹¹ “Importunate Prayer for Millennial Glory,” in WJE 22:368-377; To the Reverend Eleazar Wheelock, October 9, 1740, in WJE 16:85.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 371.

ordinary.³⁹³ But on July 5, 1741, Edwards traveled to nearby Suffield. After the passing in April of their long-time pastor, Ebenezer Devotion (1684-1741), Suffield was still without a settled pastor. Edwards went to administer the Lord's Supper to close to five hundred church members, ninety-seven of them having joined the congregation that day which is most likely the highest number of communicants accepted into a church in a single day in colonial New England.³⁹⁴ The next day Edwards preached and after the sermon the people exhibited many of the signs of enthusiasm Chauncy would later level against the revivalists, including crying, groaning, shrieking, bodily contortions, and trance-like possessions.³⁹⁵ Two days later after ministering to these awakened souls, Edwards made his way to the village of Enfield whose congregation had a reputation for being hardened to revival.³⁹⁶ There he delivered what many consider to be America's most famous sermon.

Edwards proclaimed an awakening sermon that, on top of the fire and brimstone message of hell's torment, gave an eschatological warning as to avoid being caught unaware if death "came as a thief," using Revelation 19:15 to challenge his listeners to

³⁹³ Stout, preface to the period, in WJE 22:33.

³⁹⁴ Douglas Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley," *Church History* 74, no. 4 (December 2005): 683.

³⁹⁵ Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast?," 684.

³⁹⁶ Stout, preface to the period, in WJE 22:33. Doug Winiarski traces this lore of Enfield to Connecticut historian Benjamin Trumbull, who first described the congregation in negative terms, which was then excerpted by Joseph Tracy in his seminal account of the Great Awakening in 1841 and then perpetuated down to even current times. Winiarski casts doubts whether Enfield was any different than surrounding villages like Suffield. See Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast?" 701-702.

fear the winepress of God's wrath.³⁹⁷ Such was the homiletical effect of Edwards's sermon that many witnesses attested to multitudes moaning and crying over the fate of their souls.³⁹⁸ Edwards exhorted the Enfield congregation that "Christ has flung the door of mercy wide open, and stands in the door calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to him, and pressing into the kingdom of God," and pleading with them, "How awful is it to be left behind at such a day!"³⁹⁹ Edwards accentuated the warning by invoking their neighbors: "Are not your souls as precious as the souls of the people at Suffield, where they are flocking from day to day to Christ?"⁴⁰⁰ Despite its common designation as a hell-fire sermon, Wilson H. Kinnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney see *Sinners* as more of an eschatological one.⁴⁰¹ Avihu Zakai argues that the apocalyptic dimensions of *Sinners* has not received proper attention and that "since the revival was transforming history into the dimension of realized eschatology, human fate had to be understood as inextricable from God's work

³⁹⁷ *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, in WJE 22:409; 413.

³⁹⁸ Stout, preface to the period, in WJE 22:34. The Rev. Stephen Williams of Longmeadow wrote regarding the effect of the sermon upon him: "I Seemd affectd & movd-ready to dissolve in Tears, but cant well tell why." See Stephen Williams, "Diary," Storrs Public Library, Longmeadow, MA, vol. III, 376. https://longmeadowlibrary.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/steven-williams-diary_vol-03.pdf.

³⁹⁹ *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, in WJE 22:416-417.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 417.

⁴⁰¹ Wilson H. Kinnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., introduction to *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), xvii-xviii. See also Wilson H. Kinnach, editor's introduction to "Yield to God's Word, or Be Broken by His Hand," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 25, Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758*, ed., Wilson H. Kinnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 209. Edwards himself did not file *Sinners* under the heading "Hell" in his "Miscellanies."

of redemption unfolding within history.”⁴⁰² In other words, Edwards felt the events unfolding before his own eyes in Enfield was part of the prophesied dispensations of God’s redemptive history.

The events of the Great Awakening provided fertile ground for a reexamination of many theological concerns and thus became a plumb line for New England ministers and lay leaders. Unlike the Northampton revival earlier, Boston was as much affected as the outlying areas and therefore most of the leading clergymen of the time were forced to choose sides between the Old and New Lights. Chauncy and the anti-revivalists stood on the side of reason as the ultimate human arbiter of religiosity. They represented the traditional Standing Order and astutely utilized their religious decorum to have established institutional entities like Harvard and Yale fall in line. For Edwards, the skein of theological knots could not be untangled by mere human reasoning; the religious affections of the heart were God’s preferred method of bringing together reason and revelation. Much of the debate over Edwards’s role in the Awakening amounts to the question of whether he was more of a rationalistic enthusiast or an enthusiastic rationalist. Many influential studies have portrayed Edwards as a moderate who tried to thread the needle between two extremes.⁴⁰³ Douglas Winiarski argues, however, that the events at

⁴⁰² Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s History of Philosophy: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 282; 285.

⁴⁰³ Winiarski, “Jonathan Edwards: Enthusiast?” 688-690.

Suffield and Enfield show Edwards engaging in deliberate performative actions encouraging and even inciting the kind of enthusiasm he would later decry.⁴⁰⁴

Was Edwards inconsistent in what he wrote and what he did during the revivals? It would seem Edwards had a change of mind about the nature of enthusiasm after the revivals became more radicalized and scandalized by itinerants like James Davenport. But another way to view both the preaching of *Sinners* and Edwards's seemingly odd toleration of its enthusiasm afterward is through his developing apocalyptic views. Edwards had always anticipated a fresh wind of the spirit animating a revival before the coming of the glorious day of the Lord and he clearly believed that what was happening at Enfield on that fateful day was not the result of human means. For no matter how powerfully he preached Edwards was convicted that above and beyond human efforts was the dispensational advancement of God's plan for humankind's redemption. The theological battles being waged were not just about whether the revivals were the work of God or the foibles of humanity, but about the direction and future of the world. Edwards was willing to let the spirit take the lead and to deal with the consequences whatever it may be and however it would come.

Edwards's preaching and publications during the Awakening laid the groundwork for a certain strain of evangelicalism centered on an apocalyptic revivalism. H. Richard Niebuhr states: "It is remarkable how under the influence of the Great Awakening the millenarian expectation flourished in America."⁴⁰⁵ Alan Heimert adds, "The watershed in

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 690-691. Winiarski leans heavily on the Savage manuscript, the recollections of merchant Samuel Phillips Savage, to make his case.

⁴⁰⁵ Niebuhr, *Kingdom of God*, 141.

American history marked by the 1740's can be understood best in terms of the degree to which, after the Great Awakening, the American populace was filled with the notion of an impending millennium."⁴⁰⁶ In the waning months of the Great Awakening, Edwards and the coterie of revivalist ministers held firm to the conviction that the revivals were the rumblings of some greater work to come. In March 1743, Thomas Prince, Jr., with the backing of his father, began publishing *The Christian History, containing Accounts of Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great Britain and America*, as an archive of all things related to revival as the precursor to millennial hopes—similar publications were already collating revival testimonies in England and Scotland.⁴⁰⁷

But the New Lights had to contend with increasing institutional opposition to the revivals. Just a few months after the launch of *The Christian History*, in May 1743 at a post-Election day meeting in Boston, a coalition of Old Lights gathered to pass a resolution comprehensively condemning the revivals.⁴⁰⁸ Despite such setbacks, New Lights persisted, convening in July to publish a rebuttal, *The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly of Pastors of Church in New England*, which a hundred and eleven ministers signed.⁴⁰⁹ In concord they declared their hope for “the Glory of the latter days.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁶ Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 59.

⁴⁰⁷ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:31n8. Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 109. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 171-172. William McCulloch, an Edwards's correspondent, was an early pioneer as editor of *The Glasgow Weekly History Relating to the Late Progress of the Gospel At Home and Abroad*. James Robe, another Scottish correspondent of Edwards, started *Christian History Monthly* in 1743.

⁴⁰⁸ Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:79.

⁴⁰⁹ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:30. Goen, editor's introduction to WJE 4:79.

Although Edwards did not attend the meeting, he, along with the pastors of Hampshire County, sent a letter in support “to give testimony to the late glorious work of God’s grace,” and to state that “we judge that there has been within the last two years and an half, a blessed outpouring of the Spirit of God in this county, in awakening and converting sinners...”⁴¹¹ The authorship is corporate but the language is akin to elements of Edwards’s *A Faithful Narrative and Some Thoughts*. Although by 1744 the Awakening was all but over, pro-revivalist ministers continued to push for an evangelical agenda with an added sense of millennial urgency. They commonly included proclamations of *Maranatha*, Lord come quickly, in the coda of their letters and sermons.⁴¹²

Just as Edwards took stock of why the spirit faded away after the little revival of Northampton, he similarly evaluated the waning of the Awakening in a letter to William McCulloch, the catalyst of the Cambuslang revivals in Scotland. Edwards wrote to the fellow revivalist:

But God is now going and returning to his place, till we acknowledge our offense, and I hope to humble his church in New England, and purify it, and so fit it for yet greater comfort, that he designs in due time to bestow upon it. God may deal with his church, as he deals with a particular saint; commonly after his first comfort, the clouds return, and there [is] a season of remarkable darkness, and hidings of God's face, and buffetings of Satan; but all to fit [him] for greater mercy; and as it was with Christ himself.⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ *The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly of Pastors of Churches in New-England, At a Meeting in Boston July 7, 1743* in Bushman, ed., *The Great Awakening: Documents*, 129-132.

⁴¹¹ “To the Convocation of Evangelical Ministers,” in WJE 4:542.

⁴¹² Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 125.

⁴¹³ To the Rev. William McCulloch of Cambuslang, Scotland, May 12, 1743, in WJE 4:540.

After the Awakening Edwards began to see himself in more of a prophetic role for the purification of the church, not just for his congregation in Northampton, but for New England as a whole. Just like an Old Testament prophet Edwards knew this entailed speaking and writing with a prophetic, apocalyptic voice of truth regardless of backlash or unwanted consequences. But after the quiet period of the Awakening settled in Edwards was quicker to distance New England from the center of his millennial map. In a letter in 1745 to an unknown correspondent in Scotland, Edwards spoke again of “dark clouds” over some places of revival and although Satan seemed to be prevailing somewhat “since the work has ceased very much in New England” but God is still at work elsewhere as revival “has broke out wonderfully in Virginia,” and in New Jersey.⁴¹⁴ As the New England revivals faded increasingly into the distant past, Edwards vision of future revivals as the harbinger of God’s glorious work began to take on a more expansive, global focus.

Revival Globalized: An Humble Attempt

The *Humble Attempt* is one of the major works of Edwards that seems to be comparatively overlooked by scholars, perhaps in part due to its heavily-drawn apocalyptic focus. But in this work we see the clearest examples of Edwards as a postmillennialist. Although futurist and preterist are anachronistic terms, they provide the framework through which we can view later debates about pre and post-millennialism. In

⁴¹⁴ To a Correspondent in Scotland, November 1745, in WJE 16:183-184. The editor suggests the recipient of the letter was probably Rev. John MacLaurin of Glasgow, 180.

the nineteenth century those with a futurist view of prophetic texts in Revelation were usually cast as pessimists and more aligned with premillennialism as opposed to those with a preterist view who were cast as optimists and more aligned with postmillennialism. Although Edwards was not the progressive optimists of nineteenth-century postmillennialists, in the *Humble Attempt* he modeled a path for those who looked to be more hands-on in ushering in the millennial age, giving a biblical basis for longing for that time and for praying it forward.

While the evangelical revivalists faced institutional challenges within New England, Edwards took solace in a renewed hope for a Trans-Atlantic alliance of igniting a worldwide revival. At the closing of 1744 in December, Edwards preached a sermon, *Approaching the End of God's Grand Design*, based on Revelation 21:6 – “And he said unto me. It is done.”⁴¹⁵ With great ambition Edwards laid out the argument that all of creation, like streams of a river which flow into the ocean, come together for one great purpose. “What is this one great design that God has in view in all his works and dispensations?” Edwards asked.⁴¹⁶ The answer: “Tis to present to his Son a spouse in perfect glory from amongst sinful, miserable mankind, blessing all that comply with his will in this matter and destroying all his enemies that oppose it, and so to communicate and glorify himself through Jesus Christ, God-man.”⁴¹⁷ For Edwards even the greatness of the recent Awakening was merely a tributary to an ocean of God's glory. Edwards

⁴¹⁵ *Approaching the End of God's Grand Design*, in WJE 25:113.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

added: “This I take to be the great design of the work of creation [and the] work of providence.”⁴¹⁸ Edwards highlighted the Christological focus of soteriology by equating the terms of the marriage betrothal of Christ and the church within redemptive history by stating, “the work of redemption is the grand design of [history], this the chief work of God, [the] end of all other works, so that the design of God is one.”⁴¹⁹

Insinuating that the beginnings of the final stages of this work might be upon his hearers, Edwards alluded to Revelation 16:17 where the seventh angel poured out his vial and a voice from heaven proclaimed, “It is done,” and thus exhorted his congregation: “it will be of infinite consequence to you that you should have a part of it,” and asked rhetorically, “Will you not earnestly seek an interest in this glory?”⁴²⁰ While Edwards mobilized strong apocalyptic terms in order to transport the myopic and localized outlook of his parishioners to the overarching cosmic framework of God’s redemptive work, at the end of the sermon Edwards brought them back to the everyday lived reality of their lives by stressing the evangelical language of revival—“the application of redemption is singular and particular: a distinct work being wrought on every individual person.”⁴²¹

Edwards fused the cosmic dimension of redemption with the particulars of history by expanding the scope of revival. Notwithstanding his overstated case for a place of first importance for New England in *Some Thoughts*, Edwards had always believed the events

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 125.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 126.

leading up to the millennium would not be confined to America but that it would be a global phenomenon of the spirit's outpouring.⁴²² Perhaps the difficulties at home within his own congregation and the disappointments with the religious factionalism of New England clergy enhanced and reinforced his burgeoning globalist outlook. Further solidifying his internationalist perspective was King George's War (1744-48), the theaters of conflict played out in North America between England and France. In 1745, British forces took the French bastion in Nova Scotia, the fortress of Louisbourg, and nearly twenty in Edwards's congregation had joined the successful expedition.⁴²³ Like many colonial leaders, Edwards saw this unlikely victory as God's providence over Catholic France, the outcome precipitated by a unity of prayer. That same year Prince Charles Edward Stuart, "the young pretender," took over Scotland and tried to restore Catholicism in England but was eventually defeated; then a year later a fleet of French ships sent to recapture Louisbourg experienced setbacks because of a major storm.⁴²⁴

The convergence of favorable signs encouraged Edwards to join in an international effort of prayer initiated by his friends in Scotland. In a letter to a Scottish correspondent in 1745, Edwards gave his commitment to the Concert of Prayer proposed by John MacLaurin (1693-1754) of Glasgow and expressed concern for the political

⁴²² Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 552-553.

⁴²³ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 310-311.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 311-318. Charles Edward Stuart's attempt to restore his father, James III, "the old pretender" to the throne of England was followed with great interest by Edwards and the colonists for fear of a Catholic king. See, To a Correspondent in Scotland, November 1745, in WJE 16:197n5.

situation in Scotland of the threat of the Pretender's eldest son, saying "It is a day of great commotion and tumult among the nations, and what the issue will be we know not: but it now becomes us, and the church of God everywhere, to cry to him, that he would overrule all for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and the bringing on the expected peace and prosperity of Zion."⁴²⁵ But to Edwards's disappointment the Concert of Prayer failed to garner much support in New England. After nearly two years of trying to gain traction for the prayer movement, in 1747 Edwards wrote a treatise in an effort to further the cause titled, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer*.⁴²⁶

If in *Some Thoughts* Edwards had inadvertently elevated the role of New England in the millennial drama, in the *Humble Attempt* he struck a different tone, lamenting the religious declension of New England and the colonies. A future-oriented hope in prayer seemed to be the best remedy.⁴²⁷ As was evident in the sub-title: *For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time*, a large portion of the *Humble Attempt* was derived from Edwards's ongoing study of Revelation. Edwards was prepared to use his lifetime of intense research on the Apocalypse and promote it to the wider public. Conscious of his Scottish counterparts who through persecution and war had the

⁴²⁵ To a Correspondent in Scotland, November 1745, in WJE 16:197.

⁴²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth* (Boston: D. Henchman, 1747).

⁴²⁷ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 166.

scars of possible Catholic takeover still fresh in their minds, Edwards wrote what was essentially a millennial Protestant screed. Edwards began by describing the most prosperous time for the church as prophesied in Zechariah 8:20-22. The glorious advancement of the church” would be brought upon “by great multitudes in different towns and countries taking up a *joint resolution*, and coming into an express and visible *agreement*, that they will, by united and extraordinary *prayer*, seek to God that he would come and manifest himself, and grant the tokens and fruits of his gracious presence.”⁴²⁸

The millennium would be marked by a population explosion of conversions. He wrote:

And it must be considered, that if the number of mankind at the beginning of this period be no more than equal to the present number, yet we may doubtless conclude, that the number of true saints through the thousand years, will begin with that vast advantage, beyond the multiplication of mankind...How much greater then will be the number of true converts, that will be brought to a participation of the benefits of Christ's redemption, during that period, than in all other times put together?⁴²⁹

The most technical section of the work was also the most millennialist in orientation. One important issue Edwards addressed was the interpretation of Revelation 11 where it describes the slaying of the two witnesses by the beast. Some interpreters such as Roger Williams and Cotton Mather espoused a futurist view, which saw the slaying of the witnesses as yet to be fulfilled and refers to the persecution of the church at a future time. Much later in 1756, Aaron Burr Sr. (1716-1757), Edwards’s son-in-law, would preach a famous sermon taking a futurist stand on the passage and prophetically warning the church that “many Things may make us expect that *difficult* and *trying* Times

⁴²⁸ *Humble Attempt*, in WJE 5:314.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 343.

are coming on the *Church and the World*.”⁴³⁰ Edwards took a different stand. Writing with the hope of a global revival, Edwards felt that those holding a futurist view were either directly or indirectly discouraging the advancement of the future kingdom because they made people fearful of the coming period of persecution for the church.⁴³¹ Edwards instead took a preterist stance, which saw the slaying of the witnesses as having already been fulfilled. In his earlier studies on the Apocalypse, Edwards equated the slaying of the witnesses with the pre-Reformation persecution of groups like the Waldenses and the Albigenses.⁴³² The fears of a future persecution were unfounded, claimed Edwards, and he showed his readers the fruits of his years of research on the matter.

The *Humble Attempt* was an occasional work in that Edwards had an intended purpose and audience in mind, which resulted in him taking his most optimistic positions regarding the millennium. A significant portion of Edwards’s millennial analysis in it was an internal dialogue with Moses Lowman, the author of *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation of St. John* (1737), the singular source that Edwards drew upon most heavily in his eschatological reflections.⁴³³ In Edwards’s *Notes on the Apocalypse* he even had a

⁴³⁰ Aaron Burr Sr., *A Sermon Preached Before the Synod of New York* (New York: H. Gaine, 1756), 23, 26.

⁴³¹ Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:43. See also Rodney L. Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of ‘Two Witnesses’ in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 243.

⁴³² Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:43.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 55. Moses Lowman, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation of St. John* (London: n.p., 1737). Gerald McDermott traces Lowman’s dispensational, progressive view of history through late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Dutch eschatology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), with whom Lowman studied, and with Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706), whose *Theoretico-Practica Theologia* Edwards preferred second only to the Bible. See McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 80.

subsection titled, “Extracts from Mr. Lowman.”⁴³⁴ Although Edwards was indebted in his studies of Revelation to Lowman, he was quite clear in his notes when he disagreed with an interpretation. For instance, Lowman, like many English dissenting ministers, interpreted Constantine the Great’s conversion in a negative light whereas Edwards viewed Constantine as God’s providential intervention in response to Roman persecution of the church.⁴³⁵ In another section in the Notes titled, “Remarks on Lowman,” Edwards pointed out contradictions and inconsistencies, especially in Lowman’s work on synchronisms.⁴³⁶

Edwards’s main contestation with Lowman, however, was with the disparity in their millennial calculations. Edwards wrote: “A late very learned and ingenious expositor of the Revelation, viz., Mr. Lowman, sets the fall of Antichrist, and consequently the coming of Christ’s kingdom, at a great *distance*; supposing that the twelve hundred and sixty years of Antichrist’s reign did not begin till the year seven hundred and fifty-six; and consequently that it will not end till after the year two thousand, more than two hundred and fifty years hence; and this opinion he confirms by a great variety of arguments.”⁴³⁷ Edwards tried to undermine Lowman’s date-setting with the standard biblical texts against trying to ascertain precise dates—Daniel 12:9: ‘The

⁴³⁴ “No. 94. Extracts from Mr. Lowman,” in WJE 5:219.

⁴³⁵ *Humble Attempt*, in WJE 5:400.

⁴³⁶ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:252.

⁴³⁷ *Humble Attempt*, in WJE 5:394. Lowman’s calculations would put the fall of the Antichrist at the year 2016.

words are closed up, and sealed, till the time of the end,' and Jesus' rebuke to his disciples in Acts 1:7: "Tis not for you to know the times and seasons, that the Father hath put in his own power."⁴³⁸ Edwards further clarified:

And therefore when a particular divine appears, that thinks he has found it out, and has unsealed this matter, and made it manifest with very manifold and abundant evidence, we may well think he is mistaken, and doubt whether those supposed evidences are truly solid ones, and such as are indeed sufficient to make that matter manifest, which God has declared should be kept hid, and not made manifest before 'tis accomplished. Mr. Lowman's own words in his preface, pp. xxiv–xxv, are here worthy to be repeated: "It will (says he) ever be a point of wisdom, not to be over-busy, or overconfident in anything, especially in fixing periods of time, or determining seasons; which it may be are not to be determined, it may be are not fit to be known. It is a maxim, of greater wisdom than is usually thought, 'Seek not to know what should not be revealed.'⁴³⁹

Having admonished his readers of the precariousness of setting times and dates, Edwards still invested much effort in constructing an expedient millennial timeline. A major conundrum of Revelation was the meaning of the seven trumpets and the seven vials. Edwards, like many of the English expositors of Revelation, sought the historical reconstruction of the trumpets and vials by matching them with historically significant events. In the *Humble Attempt*, Edwards provided a timeline that was derived from, but a variant of Lowman's. Earlier in his conjectures Edwards thought that the first vial was fulfilled through John Wycliffe (c. 1320s-1384), Jan Huss (1336-1415), and Jerome of Prague (1379-1416) and the second through Luther and the Reformation, with the third

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 397.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

vial being poured out through the fountains of popery.⁴⁴⁰ But following Lowman he identified the Reformation with the fifth vial, meaning the millennium was much closer than in his previous calculations.⁴⁴¹ All this was meticulously worked out in his *Notes*, where in the subsection “Tractate on Revelation 16:12,” Edwards accepted Lowman’s assertion that the first five vials had already been poured out and there remained only the sixth and the seventh to be fulfilled.⁴⁴² Edwards surmised that the sixth vial would be the fall of Turkey and the establishment of true religion in parts of Europe occupied by the Turks.⁴⁴³ The seventh and final vial was the overthrow of the Church of Rome and thereafter, the demise of the Muslim and heathen kingdoms.

Edwards’s expressed reason to go against Lowman’s distant timeframe was clear when he wrote in the *Humble Attempt*:

“And since his opinion stands so much in the way of that great and important affair, to promote which is the very end of this whole discourse, I hope it will not look as though I affected to appear considerable among the interpreters of prophecy, and as a person of skill in these mysterious matters, that I offer some reasons against Mr. Lowman's opinion. ‘Tis surely great pity, that it should be received as a thing clear and abundantly confirmed, that the glorious day of Antichrist's fall is at so great a distance (so directly tending to damp and discourage all earnest prayers for, or

⁴⁴⁰ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:115 n9. Edwards’s earliest statements on the first three vials are in “Miscellanies,” *xx.*, in WJE 13:195-196.

⁴⁴¹ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 167.

⁴⁴² “Tractate on Revelation 16:12,” in WJE 5:288. The Tractate, as well as several other subheadings, are bundled in the *Notes on the Apocalypse*. The chronology of all the different subheadings are not clear but Stein observes that, based on Thomas Shafer’s work on the handwriting and ink analysis, the unattached “Tractate on Revelation 16:12” place these pages around 1746 or early 1747. See “Note on the Manuscript and Text,” in WJE 5:79.

⁴⁴³ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:190.

endeavors after its speedy accomplishment) unless there be good and plain ground for it.”⁴⁴⁴

Despite Edwards’s warnings against a preoccupation with dates he was personally invested in a millennial timeline that would promote prayers for an international revival. For this he was willing to reorder and recalculate his millennial framework so that it would fit with the overall schema of the *Humble Attempt*. But for all the language of immanence, Edwards’s own calculations were not too far from Lowman’s, as he wrote: “If the Spirit of God should immediately be poured out, and that great work of God’s power and grace should now begin, which in its progress and issue should complete this glorious effect; there must be an amazing and unparalleled progress of the work and manifestation of divine power to bring so much to pass, by the year 2000.”⁴⁴⁵ As Edwards was writing after the events of the Great Awakening he was anticipating even greater international revivals of “unparalleled progress” in the not too distant future, while preparing his hearers that this work might progress well into the next few centuries.

It seems Edwards adopted an optimistic postmillennial view in the *Humble Attempt* because he was committed to promoting prayers for a global revival that would usher in the millennial kingdom. To this end, he even reformulated his millennial calculations, advocating for both an imminent and distant millennium. While he displayed the anticipatory anxieties of an imminent revival he also acknowledged that an “immediate pouring out” required an “unparalleled progress,” which would not happen

⁴⁴⁴ *Humble Attempt*, in WJE 5:398-99.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 411.

overnight. Even if underway it would require a period of buildup perhaps even to the year 2000. What is most striking in Edwards's time-setting is not that he wanted to hedge his bet by having it both ways. It was his continual commitment and return to a focus on pastoral ministry. His practical theology would not allow him to accept that the millennium would be so far away as to invite complacency or despondency since his goal in writing the *Humble Attempt* was precisely to encourage people not to give up on the spirit of revival but to pray for an imminent work of God on a truly global scale.

Antichrist Actualized: Anti-Catholicism and the Apocalypse

To modern readers what may figure most prominently in the *Humble Attempt* is not Edwards's esoteric millennial notes, but rather his unhindered anti-Catholicism. This may be another reason why the work is often overlooked. Although Edwards was very much within the English post-Reformation Protestant tradition in this regard, I would argue his stance against the papacy ran much deeper due to his immersion in church history and his life-long efforts of trying to unlock the mysteries of the Apocalypse. In other words, in can be argued that more than the typical Protestant divine who wrote disparagingly about the Catholic Church, Edwards's anti-Catholicism was incisive, relentless, and incessant in proportion to his commitment to his apocalypticism. Revelation was Edwards's primary source and spiritual inspiration in his attacks against the Catholic Church. Edwards acknowledged that the interpretations of many elements in Revelation were arguable, but throughout his writings on apocalyptic themes the one certainty he defended dogmatically was the identification of the Antichrist with the

Roman papacy.⁴⁴⁶ Edwards held to this belief with unwavering conviction because it was intimately tied to his version of God’s redemptive plan for the world. He considered the bifurcation of the genuine (Protestant) church and the Antichrist as the very engine of history. Therefore, the harshest criticisms from his pen seemed to come at the expense of the Roman church and he often did not mince words. In numerous passages in the *Notes* he made pointed attacks accusing the Romish church of being the church of the devil, while the Church of England was compared to Pergamos, one of the seven churches of Revelation, where “Satan’s seat is.”⁴⁴⁷

For Edwards, the clearest identification of the Roman church and specifically, the office of the pope as the Antichrist, was in the descriptions of the woman (whore of Babylon) in Revelation 17. As to verse 18 of the chapter where it refers to the woman in the great city who reigns over the kings of the earth, Edwards wrote: “This verse is spoken the plainest of any one passage in the whole book, and is a key to the whole prophecy, whereby the general meaning of it may be unerringly discovered.”⁴⁴⁸ Following the English biblical scholar Matthew Poole (1624-1679), Edwards saw Revelation 17 as the “key” to interpreting the entire book.⁴⁴⁹ The great city was Rome

⁴⁴⁶ Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:12.

⁴⁴⁷ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:99.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁴⁹ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 170-171n17. Matthew Poole, *Synopsis Criticorum aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae Interpretum*, 5 vols. (London: Typis J. Flesher & T. Roycroft, 1669-1676). See also Stein, editor’s introduction to WJE 5:59-61. Matthew Poole was a biblical exegete from Emmanuel College, Cambridge whose tutor was the editor of Joseph Mede’s works. His biblical commentaries were considered without peer and popular with New England divines. Edwards utilized Poole’s commentary on Revelation, although to what degree is uncertain.

and the whore, the seat of popery. For Edwards this was so plain he did not even bother to explain the verse in the *Notes*. Douglas Sweeney writes in a footnote regarding Revelation 17 and Edwards, “It was the only one of John’s visions interpreted for him by the Lord and His angel as a guide to the rest,” and it colored his overall approach to the book as the unfolding of the battle between the whore (pope) and the Lamb (Christ).⁴⁵⁰ Edwards argued that just as God established his Son Jesus Christ, in imitation, Satan had established his son, the Antichrist, alluding to Revelation 13:2 [in the entry Edwards erroneously refers to Revelation 14:2], where the dragon gives the beast his power, seat, and great authority.⁴⁵¹ Edwards continued, “Antichrist is the eldest son of Satan, as Christ is the eldest Son of God.”⁴⁵²

Edwards left no tool unturned in his accusations against the Church of Rome, using at his disposal historical, biblical, analogical, allegorical, typological, numerological, and any available methods of interpretation to buttress his arguments. For example, in an early entry in the “Miscellanies” labeled “Antichrist,” Edwards addressed a common defense: How can the Roman church be Antichrist if it professes Christ? To which Edwards answered that the Catholic Church is all the worse for it.⁴⁵³ Edwards then used a creative analogy, arguing that just as “the filthiness of a toad or snake is much

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 354n17.

⁴⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1273, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 23, The Miscellanies, Entry Nos. 1153-1360*, ed. Douglas E. Sweeney (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 217.

⁴⁵² “Miscellanies,” no. 1273, in WJE 23:217.

⁴⁵³ “Miscellanies,” *hh.*, in WJE 13:186.

more abominable for being joined to life” instead of being in a state of lifelessness, similarly “the hatefulness of the devil is much greater for its being united with an angelical nature,” making the Church of Rome worse than even heathens, Jews, and Muslims for being attached to Christ.⁴⁵⁴ In another entry in the “Miscellanies,” Edwards related the burial denied after the slaying of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:8-10 to past atrocities against the dead committed by the Roman church, writing, “And we know that thus the Papists used always to do, very often venting their rage like fools upon their dead bodies, tearing and burning [them], sometimes digging them out of the earth on purpose to do those things to them,” and that they would even curse and excommunicate them after they were dead.⁴⁵⁵ In the Revelation section of his “Blank Bible,” his commentary on the scriptures, Edwards even revealed his interest in numerology where in reference to the number of the beast he was partial to Isaac Newton’s interpretation (among many) that the latin *λατεινος* (man of Latium) and the Hebrew *רומי* (of Rome), whose numeral letters taken together added up to 666.⁴⁵⁶

The sheer depth of research Edwards was willing to undergo to document that the sixth vial was being fulfilled in real time is reflected in a subsection of the *Notes* titled: “An Account of Events Probably Fulfilling the Sixth Vial on the River Euphrates, the News of Which Was Received since October 16, 1747.” In meticulous detail Edwards recounted current events relating to the Catholic Church and any signs of its decline and

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ “Miscellanies,” *uu.*, in WJE 13:191.

⁴⁵⁶ “Blank Bible,” note on Revelation, in WJE 24:1229.

demise, from big events such as the effects of the great earthquake of Lima, Peru (1746), to the minutiae of financial information like clerical salaries and the tabulation of how many guns and men were lost in the various battles against Protestant forces.⁴⁵⁷ Had Edwards lived a few years longer he must have regarded the suppression of the Jesuits by the papacy starting in 1759 (a year after his passing) as irrefutable evidence of the pouring of the sixth vial, for he equated the “image of the beast” with the religious orders of the Roman church, writing: “I am ready, with the best critics I know, to interpret this of the religious orders of the Church of Rome (particularly that of the Jesuits), who have many of 'em [*sic*] temporal estates and jurisdictions.”⁴⁵⁸

Edwards viewed much of ecclesiastical history after the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church through the lens of the historical conflicts between the papacy and its evangelical opposition. Ever since the hegemony of Christendom under Constantine the history of the church was an amalgam of light and darkness. For example, in attempting to give a fair evaluation of Charles the Great (Charlemagne), Edwards wrote that although the emperor had aided greatly to the prosperity of the church, corruptions soon followed with the worship of saints and images, the doctrine of purgatory, masses for the dead, doctrine of the real presence, adoration of consecrated bread, perfection and merit of monastic life, and so on.⁴⁵⁹ Edwards believed, however, that there was always a remnant of faithful evangelicals. Like most Protestants Edwards

⁴⁵⁷ “An Account of Events Probably Fulfilling the Sixth Vial,” in WJE 5:253-285.

⁴⁵⁸ “Blank Bible,” note on Revelation, in WJE 24:1227.

⁴⁵⁹ “No. 94. Extracts from Mr. Lowman,” in WJE 5:233.

held up in honor the churches of the Waldenses and he suggested a possible connection of these evangelical forerunners of the Reformation to the woman in the wilderness in Revelation 12:6, with the “wilderness” referring to the valleys of Piedmont (historical location of the Waldenes), the “obscure, desolate, unknown, hidden place in the midst of those inaccessible mountains.”⁴⁶⁰ Such persecution showed that the real spiritual battle was not Christianity against heathens but between the true saints versus the false usurpers of the church. In another section of the “Tractate on Revelation,” Edwards went so far as to accuse the Church of Rome as preferring the Turkish empire over Protestants in certain territories, thereby using the Muslim religion as a defensive barrier. Edwards concluded if Russia and the Turkish empire would turn to Christianity it would suffer a major blow to the Antichrist.⁴⁶¹

Even though Edwards engaged in many theological battles of his day he was not by nature polemical. We may as well remember that most of his writings on the Antichrist and the Roman church were detailed, rather clinical historical studies of the ways the papacy had deviated. But once in a while Edwards would resort to naked polemics. In one particularly scathing passage on Revelation Chapter 13, he wrote:

[He] pretends to the same power over the church as Jesus Christ hath, pretending to have power to pardon sin, of managing the affairs of the invisible world, and to infallibility, which things are the prerogatives of God alone; so that he places himself in the church or the temple of God, in God’s place, [and] presumes to mount Christ’s throne. Yea, he places

⁴⁶⁰ “Miscellanies,” yy., in WJE 13:196-197. See 197n6. The editors find the language Edwards used to be similar to Samuel Morland in his *History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piemont... Together with a Most Naked and Punctual Relation of the Late Bloody Massacre* (London: n.p., 1650).

⁴⁶¹ “Tractate on Revelation 16:12,” in WJE 5:304.

himself above God by pretending to a power of altering his laws at pleasure, dispensing with oaths taken by the name of God and vows made to him, dispensing with what God has positively forbidden, and making that unlawful which he has commanded; and by pretending to have the wrath of God at command, can make any man the subject of it at their will by excommunication; [and] by pretending to a power to create their Creator in transubstantiation, as in express terms they boast they can do. To suppose a power to do these things, supposes a superiority to God; thus Antichrist exalts himself above all that is called God or is worshiped. He also blasphemes God by cursing and anathematizing the sacred doctrines of the gospel, and by their idolatry, which is called blasphemy. Yes, their whole religion is blasphemy.⁴⁶²

Here we come across Edwards in one of his most vitriolic diatribes. He railed against the veneer of papal infallibility and the unquestioned power of excommunication. He mocked the doctrine of transubstantiation by use of exaggeration and he claimed in no uncertain terms that the church was blaspheming God and humans. The kind of language employed by Edwards was consistent with Protestant propaganda against the Roman church and in this sense Edwards was a man of his times and circumstance. Protestant historians were anything if not thorough in their intense research against Catholicism's deviance and abuses. However, the sum total of Edwards's writings against the Roman church would certainly qualify him as one of Protestant Christianity's most dogged chroniclers of the evidence that the papacy was the Antichrist.

For Edwards, his Anti-Catholicism was not just theory but something concretely actualized in his time. It affected the daily lives of his congregation through the looming presence of Catholic France in the North and Spain in the South. The impact and influence of Catholic missions in the Americas in comparison put Puritan missionary

⁴⁶² *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:125-126.

efforts to the Native Indians to shame. Most importantly, for Edwards the dialectical battle between the Antichrist and Christ and his body, the pure church, was the key to understanding history through the lens of Revelation. Yet for all the angst regarding the Antichrist and the Roman church Edwards always concluded by sounding an optimistic tune regarding the coming of the millennial age. Even these temporal powers that undermined the providence of God were mere instruments of Satan and Edwards had complete confidence that the millennial age through Christ's ultimate victory over Antichrist as prophesied in Revelation was coming.

The Great Release: Dismissal from Northampton, 1750

Although the 1740s started out with so much evangelical hope and millennial promise, by the middle of the decade Edwards was again decrying the spiritual decrepitude around him. The situation was not unlike the years after the Northampton revival where his congregation backslid to their former ways. During the Awakening period Edwards was determined not to let the same declension fall upon his people. One method Edwards thought would be beneficial was to enact a covenant renewal. After the young itinerant Samuel Buell (1716-1798) inflamed the Northampton congregation into a spiritual frenzy in February 1742 (the stirring that swept Sarah Edwards into spiritual ecstasies) Edwards devised a draft of a covenant renewal for his congregation to adopt.⁴⁶³ Covenant renewals were common periodic occurrences for the Congregational churches

⁴⁶³ To the Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston, December 12, 1743, in WJE 4:550-554. Edwards wrote to Thomas Prince Jr. to give an account of the revivals for publication in Prince's periodical, *Christian History*. Edwards appended a copy of the covenant renewal at the end of the letter.

of New England, a practice meant to maintain and strengthen church membership and as part of a converting apparatus.⁴⁶⁴ In March 1742, Edwards preached a sermon, “Renewing Our Covenant with God,” where he outlined the program for the covenant, which was focused mainly on practical piety and morality, such as dealing honestly in financial affairs for the adults and avoiding lasciviousness and lust for the young.⁴⁶⁵ The congregation affirmed the covenant and initially Northampton served again as a model, as within a few months seventeen other churches in Hampshire County adopted similar covenants.⁴⁶⁶

Two years after the covenant renewal, however, Edwards found himself having to contend with a number of problems within the church. One incident, which would have lasting consequences, was when several young men of the congregation made sexually suggestive comments to some girls from information they obtained from a medical book, infamously referred to as the “Young Folks’ Bible.”⁴⁶⁷ Edwards’s handling of this affair, commonly known as the “Bad Books” case rankled some influential members of the congregation for which Edwards would later pay a price.⁴⁶⁸ The rapid shift from a

⁴⁶⁴ Harry Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99-101.

⁴⁶⁵ “Renewing Our Covenant with God,” in WJE 22:509-510, 513.

⁴⁶⁶ Goen, editor’s introduction, in WJE 4:87n4.

⁴⁶⁷ Ava Chamberlain, “Bad Books and Bad Boys: The Transformation of Gender in Eighteenth-Century Northampton, Massachusetts,” *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (June 2002): 190.

⁴⁶⁸ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 301. As a matter of church discipline the occurrence of young people engaged in a scandal was unexceptional. What it underscored, however, was the rapidly changing social situation of New England. Marsden notes that the men were in their twenties, a cohort who married later and did not have the prospects of owning their own land like the previous generation.

primarily agrarian economy to mercantilism contributed to a general decline in the influence of ministers over their congregations. By the end of the 1740s life in Northampton was compartmentalized to the point where Edwards exercised hegemony only within his ecclesiastical sphere, “the community itself was pursuing a course independent of ministerial influence.”⁴⁶⁹ Not only were economic and sociological factors impinging upon ecclesiastical authority, the re-emergence of party spirit and divisiveness led to further resentments, especially when Edwards had to ask for an increase in salary for his growing family.⁴⁷⁰ Added to these were the controversies over George Whitefield’s second tour of New England. His first itinerancy was a rousing success, even acting as the main catalyst for the Great Awakening. But upon his return word spread that Whitefield was undermining New England clergy and was plotting to bring in ministers from England, a rumor that supposedly came from the mouth of Edwards himself.⁴⁷¹

In addition, Edwards’s millennialist optimism expressed in the *Humble Attempt* belied a series of unfortunate events that befell him during this time.⁴⁷² In October 1747, David Brainerd (1718-1747), missionary to the Indians (and somewhat late disciple of

⁴⁶⁹ T.W. Leavitt, “Northampton after the Halfway Covenant,” unpublished ms. (May 1962), 37. Available at the Forbes Library, Northampton. Cited in Goen, editor’s introduction, in WJE 4:87n5.

⁴⁷⁰ Patricia Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 155-156.

⁴⁷¹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 306-307. The accuser, Rector Thomas Clap (1703-1767) of Yale, and Edwards would exchange a barrage of letters defending themselves but by the end the damage had been done. There were no winners and instead a spiritual atmosphere of discord reigned.

⁴⁷² This paragraph closely follows the narrative of Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 341-344.

Edwards), passed away from tuberculosis while convalescing at the Edwards' household.⁴⁷³ Several months later Edwards's seventeen-year old daughter, Jerusha, who had so diligently served as Brainerd's nurse and spiritual companion, succumbed to her own illness.⁴⁷⁴ Like Edwards's beloved younger sister who died early in life, this daughter had many of the same world-denying tendencies. Further adding to the losses, in June 1748, Edwards's uncle, John Stoddard (1683-1748), son of Solomon Stoddard and Edward's strongest ally, unexpectedly passed away. Colonel Stoddard was Northampton's leading citizen and the pillar of Edwards's spiritual and political support. These unimaginable deaths in quick succession of three influential figures in Edwards's life must have contributed to a hastening of spiritual concerns as if he were running out of time.

Perhaps it was this sense of urgency that prompted Edwards to execute a series of moves that would eventually lead to his ouster. On top of the covenant renewal what Edwards had sought to do for some time was to overturn Solomon Stoddard's well-established ecclesiastical policies. Through his careful observations of the aftermath of

⁴⁷³ John A. Grigg, *The Lives of David Brainerd: The Making of an American Evangelical Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134-135, 124. Grigg argues that Edwards's relationship with Brainerd stems mostly from only the last four and a half months of Brainerd's life, though Edwards seems to have had an interest in his career, following Brainerd's missionary exploits through information gathered from Brainerd's acquaintances. Edwards had earlier aided in Brainerd's failed appeal to Yale but there is no evidence of much contact after that. Grigg argues then that claims of Brainerd being a protégé of Edwards are overstated.

⁴⁷⁴ Some have assumed Jerusha passed away from having contracted tuberculosis while nursing Brainerd. Norman Pettit seems to insinuate as much, see his editor's introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 7, The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 70. But Edwards never claimed this, nor does any of the early accounts of her death. For a recent source (2005) still conveying this assumption, see Gura, *Jonathan Edwards America's Evangelical*, 144.

the Awakening Edwards had been slowly coming around to a repudiation of his grandfather's practice of open communion through the Half-Way Covenant.⁴⁷⁵ Edwards felt it was time to reconsider the terms of church membership (making it stricter), entrance into the Lord's Supper, and restricting the right of non-communicant parents of having their children baptized. Edwards was not naïve to the battle that was to come but he must have been surprised at the strong immediate pushback from what seemed like the entire town.⁴⁷⁶ They accused him of deception by trying to implement changes to the Stoddardean way only after the death of the venerable Colonel Stoddard.⁴⁷⁷ The "Bad Books" affair earlier had exposed underlying tensions between Edwards and some of the powerful families of Northampton. This latest move by Edwards was seen by his enemies as a power grab and they reacted accordingly. After the death of Colonel Stoddard, the power structures of Northampton resided more with Edwards's opposition. Added to this contentious mixture was Edwards's own lack of political tact and maneuvering. A strong case could be made that Edwards made serious miscalculations about the timing and equally poor judgments about the makeup of his parishioners, having alienated the young people after the "Bad Books" case and failing to address the concerns of most of the older

⁴⁷⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "Narrative of Communion Controversy," *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 12, Ecclesiastical Writings*, ed. David D. Hall (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 507.

⁴⁷⁶ "Narrative of Communion Controversy," in WJE 12:510-511.

⁴⁷⁷ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 348.

members of Stoddard's generation who understandably opposed changes that they felt were too radical.⁴⁷⁸

On July 22, 1750, Edwards met a fate that would have been unthinkable before—in a twist of history the person most closely associated with American evangelical piety and revival was dismissed from his own pulpit.⁴⁷⁹ On the one year anniversary of his farewell sermon, Edwards wrote a letter to a Scottish correspondent, Thomas Gillespie (1708-1774), in which he expressed his personal reflections regarding his dismissal.⁴⁸⁰ Edwards was honest about the ecclesiastical power politics involved, but in essence he believed the main culprit was spiritual pride on both sides.⁴⁸¹ For the second time in his life Edwards experienced agony after the ecstasy of revival faded. On July 1, 1750, Edwards preached a farewell sermon that was tinged with eschatological overtones. He stated that their mutual parting in this world would only be temporary; they would have to meet again on judgment day. At that time the light of God would expose everyone's hearts and the "evidence of the truth shall appear beyond all dispute, and all controversies

⁴⁷⁸ Kenneth P. Minkema, "Old Age and Religion in the Writings and Life of Jonathan Edwards," *Church History* 70, no. 4 (December 2001): 691. Minkema offers a detailed analysis of the generational breakdown of Northampton during these years using church membership data. Various socio-economic factors, such as the "common land" controversy over rights of land division may have played a part in party factions. But the core issues of the dismissal are religious and ecclesiastical. For a socio-economic analysis of the period see Mark Valeri, "The Economic Thought of Jonathan Edwards," *Church History* 60, no. 1 (March 1991): 37–54. Specifically regarding Edwards's dismissal, 51.

⁴⁷⁹ Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*, 181.

⁴⁸⁰ To the Reverend Thomas Gillespie, July 1, 1751, in WJE 16:380.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 381-384.

shall be finally and forever decided.”⁴⁸² The righteous judge would determine whether Edwards fulfilled his duties as a shepherd. Identifying with Jeremiah the weeping prophet, Edwards expressed confidence that he had done his duty.

Those present when Edwards preached the Redemption Discourse sermons over a decade earlier might have remembered him saying that before the great day of the church’s deliverance, God would raise up “a number of eminent ministers” to “reprove his own church, and show her errors, and also shall convince gainsayers, and shall thoroughly detect the errors of the false church.”⁴⁸³ On the one hand, Edwards was essentially saying he was one of those eminent ministers with a prophetic voice preparing them for the last days.⁴⁸⁴ On the other hand, since his people gave him “extreme difficulties, and as he lamented, “plunging me into an abyss of trouble and sorrow,” they would have to give an account of whether they had treated their spiritual father in a way pleasing to God.⁴⁸⁵ For a farewell sermon Edwards’s text was painfully relational with an emphasis on “meeting.” An earthly divorce could not separate them from their eternal bond through Christ. Edwards should be credited with a certain amount of prescient irony—even after his dismissal he would be called upon to serve as a supply preacher to a

⁴⁸² Jonathan Edwards, “A Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct in Northampton,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 25, Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 468.

⁴⁸³ *History of the Work of Redemption*, in WJE 9:518.

⁴⁸⁴ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 49.

⁴⁸⁵ “A Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct in Northampton,” in WJE 25:478.

congregation that had dismissed him so unscrupulously.⁴⁸⁶ But in an awkward way that was very much like Edwards. He fulfilled the injudicious request because to the end he wanted to remind his congregation, through his very presence, to think and live with eternity in mind.

Chapter Conclusion

In explicating Edward's historical-redemptive apocalypticism, I identified three main characteristics: revivalistic, afflictive, and cosmic. For Edwards, these themes were intimately and intensely played out in his life in the decade from 1740-1750. Staring with the Great Awakening that came to New England, Edwards began to discover an apocalyptic voice that is revealed in *Some Thoughts*. Edwards's apocalypticism found expression in his revivalistic pronouncements, especially in his uncharacteristically optimistic role for America and New England in the hastening of the glorious time for the church. When the revivals became far greater in reach, degree, and scope than he could have imagined, Edwards turned to the motif of the work of redemption as his overarching apocalyptic focus.

By the time of Edwards's writing of the *Humble Attempt* five years after *Some Thoughts*, he sought to promote a grander vision of the revivals—one that would encompass the cosmic elements of God's ultimate plan of redemption. Along with the global outlook of *Humble Attempt*, however, was also Edwards's clearest apocalyptic

⁴⁸⁶ Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*, 181. See also Kinnach, preface to the period, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 25, Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 23.

expression of the Catholic Church as the Antichrist, which would have concrete repercussions for Edwardsean eschatology in the future. In Edwards's personal life, through a series of untimely deaths and his dismissal from Northampton, he embodied the afflictive nature of the apocalyptic. For Edwards his millennial hope was more than theological, it was a lived reality. Through trials and tribulations and the agonies and ecstasies, his life and apocalyptic thought were juxtaposed in a way that reflected a concrete, realized eschatology.

CHAPTER THREE

The Legacy of Edward's Apocalyptic Thought

In viewing the events of the last decade of Edwards's life retrospectively, his dismissal from Northampton might have been the best thing for his legacy. It was during his relatively unencumbered ministry in the Indian mission of Stockbridge where Edwards had the time to write the works that established his reputation as a preeminent philosopher theologian, including *Freedom of the Will* (1754), *Original Sin* (1758), and *The Nature of True Virtue* (finished in 1757, published posthumously in 1765). Before leaving Stockbridge to take the position of president of Princeton, Edwards planned to begin work on what he considered to be his *magnum opus*, an ambitious two-part summation of his biblical theology, *A History of the Work of Redemption* and a companion volume, *The Harmony of the Old and New Testaments*.

Unfortunately, due to complications from a small-pox vaccine Edwards passed away before completing the works. This chapter will focus on his missionary endeavors in Stockbridge before assessing the legacy of Edwards's apocalyptic thought, primarily through an exploration of the themes he intended to emphasize in *HWR*. In evaluating Edwards's apocalyptic legacy it would be instructive to view *HWR* in light of his historical-redemptive apocalypticism. The three main characteristics I find in Edward's overall historical redemptive apocalypticism—revivalistic, afflictive, and cosmic, closely follows the prominent themes highlighted in *HWR*. In establishing an outline of Edwardsean apocalyptic legacy, I seek to follow these themes as explicated and explored in the eschatological works of his later disciples.

Missions and Scholarly Missions, 1751-1757

Missions and the Millennium

After being dismissed from his pastorate Edwards had a couple of options as to the next stage of his life. A small faction in Northampton wanted him to start his own congregation in the town but Edwards was against a separatist spirit in the church.⁴⁸⁷ He was offered ministerial positions by his friends in Scotland and a church in Virginia was eager to have him as his pastor.⁴⁸⁸ But when the opportunity to serve as a pastor and missionary to the Indians of Stockbridge materialized Edwards must have seen this as a step of faith in leaving his comfort zone, for he acknowledged he did not have the experience or natural aptitude for life in a settlement at the edges of the frontier.⁴⁸⁹ Perhaps the move was the one most consistent with a life that was given to the service of advancing the millennial kingdom of Christ. In part, Edwards might have had David Brainerd's life in mind when he made the decision to go to the mission frontier at Stockbridge.

When David Brainerd died at the age of twenty-nine Edwards preached his funeral sermon, *True Saints, When Absent from the Body, Are Present with the Lord* (1747), where he spoke of identifying with the suffering of Christ, that one might reign

⁴⁸⁷ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 364-365. Kimmach, preface to the period, in WJE 25:23n6.

⁴⁸⁸ Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical*, 166.

⁴⁸⁹ Kimmach, preface to the period, in WJE 25:24-25.

with him forever.⁴⁹⁰ On his deathbed Brainerd was to have said to Jerusha: “Though, if I thought I should not see you and be happy with you in another world, I could not bear to part with you. But we shall spend an happy eternity together!”⁴⁹¹ Had Brainerd lived on perhaps he might have wanted Jerusha to join him and his beloved younger brother, John, in their missionary endeavors. When Jerusha died from her own illness only a few months later Edwards buried her next to Brainerd, perhaps symbolically signifying their intimate connection in the time of the bodily resurrection.⁴⁹²

In 1749 Edwards published, *An Account of the Life of the Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*, which he edited from Brainerd’s diary.⁴⁹³ It is in part a typical Puritan

⁴⁹⁰ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 325. *True Saints, When Absent from the Body, Are Present with the Lord*, in WJE 25:225-257.

⁴⁹¹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 326. It is difficult to ascertain from this whether Brainerd and Jerusha shared a relationship that went beyond spiritual companionship. Religious exchanges during this time often reflected such spiritualized language. This is buttressed by the fact Brainerd expressed in the same exchange that his love for Jerusha was surpassed only by the love for his younger brother, John, who was a co-worker in their missionary efforts to the Indians.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 328. Speculations regarding the idealized relationship between Brainerd and Jerusha have been hard to resist. Ola Winslow presents David Brainerd and Jerusha as having been betrothed, see Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 236. An even earlier account is found in Edwards Amasa Park’s memoir of Samuel Hopkins, see Edwards Amasa Park, “Memoir” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins, Volume I* (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865), 21. While Park was an able chronicler and historian, unfortunately he offers no additional information than that they were betrothed. This tradition has been passed down and appears even in more recent scholarship, e.g., see Mark A. Noll, “Edwards’ Theology after Edwards,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 294. But there is no documented evidence of marriage between the two, see Pettit, editor’s introduction to WJE 7:68-70. See also Joseph Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 103. Conforti notes this myth was perpetuated in the nineteenth century, the misinformation spreading even through the likes of popular pilgrimages made to the gravesite by Mount Holyoke students. See also Grigg, *The Lives of David Brainerd*, 124. Perhaps this is a case where since Brainerd was dying there was no hope for an earthly marriage. But Edwards’s curious action of burying them next to each other suggests there might have been an implicit understanding that, in essence, they were somehow spiritually united if not in this life than in the next. But this remains conjecture as there is no record of why Edwards placed their graves together.

⁴⁹³ Kinnach, preface to the period. in WJE 25:74-75. The bibliographic history of the diary is complex. A portion in two parts was published in 1746 titled, *Mirabilia Dei inter Indicos*, but became

biography, some might say hagiography, of a young missionary who endured much suffering for the glory of God. But its success was attributed to Edwards's adept and judicious editing in presenting the psychological and inner turmoil of someone who exemplified spiritual intensity and self-denial even in the midst of much failure. The backdrop of Brainerd must have played an important part in Edwards's decision to move to Stockbridge. They were both especially invested in the millennial significance of reaching out to the native population.⁴⁹⁴ In the *Life of David Brainerd*, Edwards portrayed a young man who was singularly focused on eternal things, who "sought the prosperity of Zion with all his might."⁴⁹⁵ Edwards quoted Brainerd directly of how he 'preferred Jerusalem above his chief joy,' before adding, "How did his soul long for it and pant after it! And how earnestly and often did he wrestle with God for it!"⁴⁹⁶

Edwards was part of an extended family network that had supported missionary efforts to the Indians in and around Stockbridge for many years.⁴⁹⁷ The missionary frontier of Stockbridge was founded by Colonel John Stoddard and supported in various

commonly referred to as *Brainerd's Journal*. An edited version appeared two years later under the title: *An Abridgment of Mr. David Brainerd's Journal Among the Indians* (London: John Oswald, 1748). Subsequent versions of different lengths were published under different titles. Edwards's edition represents the most popular version.

⁴⁹⁴ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 327.

⁴⁹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *An Account of the Life of the Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 7, The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 532.

⁴⁹⁶ *An Account of the Life of the Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*, in WJE 7:532.

⁴⁹⁷ George S. Claghorn, introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16, Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 20.

ways by Edwards's occasional rival family clan, the Williamses.⁴⁹⁸ The legacy of the family's Indian advocacy went a generation back when Solomon Stoddard wrote a treatise in 1723, *Question Whether God is not Angry with the Country for Doing so Little Towards the Conversion of the Indians?* where he issued a sobering rebuke to the colonists that "if the Indians were prevailed with to receive the Gospel," that their zeal "may make us ashamed, and provoke us to Emulation."⁴⁹⁹ The Reverend William Williams (1688-1760) of Hatfield, Edwards's venerable uncle and family patriarch after the death of Solomon Stoddard (one of the few in the Williams clan who embraced Edwards), regarded the conversion of the Indians to be a millennial mission and should be made a priority.⁵⁰⁰

From the time of John Eliot, the "apostle to the Indians," colonial outreach to the Indians was full of millennial hope. But it was also not without controversy. There was of course the usual European mindset of paternalistic superiority. In the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Cotton Mather, in recounting John Eliot's missionary efforts to the Indians recalled how in their wars against the colonists the Indians, not wanting to be inconvenienced by the white man's dogs, sacrificed one to the devil and afterward no dogs would bark at them for months.⁵⁰¹ Alluding to this diabolical nature Mather

⁴⁹⁸ William Williams became Edwards's uncle through his second marriage. After the passing of Solomon Stoddard, Williams took over the family patriarchy. His sons, Edwards's cousins, seem to have at certain times opposed Edwards's ministry but the history of the rivalry is difficult to ascertain due to mixed motivations and psychological insinuations. See Kimnach, preface to the period, in WJE 25:29, 32n7.

⁴⁹⁹ Solomon Stoddard, *Question Whether God is Not Angry with the Country for Doing So Little Towards the Conversion of the Indians* (Boston: B. Green, 1723), 11.

⁵⁰⁰ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 118.

⁵⁰¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 560. Excerpted from the 1853 edition.

proclaimed: “This was the miserable people which our Eliot propounded unto himself to teach and save! And he had a double work incumbent on him; he was to make men of them, ere he could hope to see them saints; they must be *civilized* ere they could be *Christianized*.”⁵⁰² Edwards, too, saw that the devil had for several millenniums “secured to himself” not only America, but the entire Western hemisphere.⁵⁰³ Edwards recounted what he had heard (most likely a conjecture from Joseph Mede) that the peopling of America occurred after the successes of Christian conversion during the time of Constantine the Great in the 4th century, where to counter the effects, the devil led a people to the New World to keep them out of the reach of the gospel and to reign over them without impediment.⁵⁰⁴ Implied was the sense that the conversion of the Indians would require undoing thousands of years of satanic inculturation.

Stockbridge was supposed to be a model missionary community with a focus on assimilating Indians to live side-by-side with the colonists, which was to serve as another sign in anticipation of the dawning of the millennium.⁵⁰⁵ By the time of Brainerd’s missionary efforts, however, a new view of Indian outreach emerged, with conversion taking precedence over civilization.⁵⁰⁶ It was conversion that would truly civilize the Indian’s heart and mind, not the other way around. Still, progress in the conversion of

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ *History of the Work of Redemption*, in WJE 9:433. Pettit, editor’s introduction to WJE 7:11.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, 433.

⁵⁰⁵ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 375.

⁵⁰⁶ Pettit, editor’s introduction to WJE 7:25.

Indians was uneven at best, with mixed results of skittish motivations and good intentions gone awry. There was always ongoing tension between missionaries, Indians, and encroaching white settlers. Edwards's ministry to the Indians in Stockbridge was met with a similar mix of genuine gospel preaching and persistent power politics. While Edwards acted with the best of intentions in desiring to teach and preach to the Indians and advocating fiercely over their welfare, a number of extenuating factors, including Indian attacks of nearby settlements contributed to the politicization and exploitation of the Stockbridge Indians.⁵⁰⁷ Edwards had to expend a lot of his time and energy in arbitrating between competing factions and had to constantly contend with the gatekeepers of Stockbridge who wanted to retain their influence and power over the mission schools, settlements, and land.⁵⁰⁸ In a letter to Thomas Gillespie in 1753 Edwards expressed his frustrations that "some great men have mightily opposed my continuing the missionary [*sic*] at Stockbridge, and have taken occasion abundantly to reproach me, and endeavor my removal. But I desire to bless God; he seems in some respects to set me out of their reach."⁵⁰⁹

All this trouble was against the backdrop of constant warfare between French-influenced Indian tribes and the British, which was as nearly as taxing for Edwards as a

⁵⁰⁷ Gerald R. McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards and American Indians: The Devil Sucks Their Blood," *The New England Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (December 1999): 555.

⁵⁰⁸ Kinnach, preface to the period, in WJE 25:28-30. See also Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 141.

⁵⁰⁹ To the Reverend Thomas Gillespie, October 18, 1753, in WJE 16:610.

wayward congregation in Northampton. Edwards had to remind himself that wherever there was a genuine work of the Holy Spirit there would be satanic opposition. But if he was discouraged by the vicious politics of Stockbridge, Edwards persisted for nearly eight years because he held fast unto the hope of Indian conversion being a prelude to the millennium. As he wrote in the *Life of David Brainerd*, “And if we consider the degree and manner in which he from time to time sought and hoped for an extensive work of grace among them, I think we have reason to hope that the wonderful things which God wrought among them by him are but a forerunner of something yet much more glorious and extensive of that kind.”⁵¹⁰ Edwards, too, believed that the work of grace in the Indians was a forerunner to a more glorious work. In *HWR*, Edwards hoped that “this vast continent of America” that is “covered with barbarous ignorance and cruelty, be everywhere covered with the glorious gospel light and Christ love,” instead of worshipping the devil.⁵¹¹ In a passage that outlined Edwards view of the millennial movement of conversion, he wrote:

And however small the propagation of the gospel among the heathen here in America has been hitherto, yet I think we may well look upon the discovery of so great a part of the world as America and bringing the gospel into it, is one thing by which divine providence is preparing the way for the future glorious times of the church when Satan's kingdom shall be overthrown not only throughout the Roman empire but throughout the whole habitable globe, on every side and all its continents. When those times come, then doubtless the gospel which is already brought over into America shall have glorious success, and all the inhabitants of this new-discovered world shall be brought over into the kingdom of Christ, as well as all the other ends of the earth.⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ *An Account of the Life of the Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*, in WJE 7:533.

⁵¹¹ *History of the Work of Redemption*, in WJE 9:472.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 434-435.

Edwards saw the millennial age as a time of flourishing for both the Indians and slaves, writing “It may be hoped that then many of the Negroes and Indians will be divines.”⁵¹³ Converted Indians and slaves would contribute to the spread of the gospel during the millennium.⁵¹⁴ And although Edwards had difficulty reconciling his millennial hopes with having to contend with Indians rights and fair treatment, Edwards remained faithful to the cause. When full scale war broke out in 1754 between the French and the British, Edwards remained in Stockbridge even though several residents had been killed by French-allied Abenaki Indians.⁵¹⁵ Those residing near the theatre of war saw the conflict as a sign of the latter days and millennial expectation was especially heightened in 1755 with the defeat of General Edward Braddock’s army at Fort Duquesne.⁵¹⁶ The war abrogated outreach to the Stockbridge Indians as the population plummeted due to disease, death, and desertion. But Edwards’s apocalyptic outlook was deeply impacted by his time as a missionary in Stockbridge. The mix of millennial optimism for the future of Indian missions he had shared with David Brainerd with the harsh realities of the difficulties of Indian conversion would be reflected in his afflictive view of the end times.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 480.

⁵¹⁴ Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (October 1997): 828. Edwards owned slaves himself and never condemned the practice in general. The only existing document of Edwards’s position on slavery paints him as an intermediary between defenders of slavery and immediate abolitionists a generation later. Although confusing at certain points, Edwards’s basic premise in the letter was to defend a narrow definition of slavery while supplying reasons to be critical of the overall slave trade. See “Draft Letter on Slavery,” in WJE 16:71-76. The issue of slavery will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

⁵¹⁵ Peter J. Thuesen, editor’s introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 26, Catalogues of Books*, ed. Peter J. Thuesen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 38.

⁵¹⁶ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 208. Thuesen, editor’s introduction to WJE 26:38.

Edwards's Historical-Redemptive Apocalypticism

While Edwards's mission in Stockbridge was bereft of success due to ongoing disputes over its direction, these years proved to be fruitful in allowing him time to prepare a number of important manuscripts for publication. In 1754, Edwards published *Freedom of the Will* in response to the Enlightenment's influence upon Boston elites.⁵¹⁷ Among the clergy this often manifested itself in a liberal theology based on a vision of the modern self, with morality based on reason and human choice and an Arminianism focused on the individual will. Edwards saw clearly that an assault on Calvinism's fundamental ideas of humankind's total depravity and God's sovereign grace would open the floodgates to a human-centered religiosity. He soon followed that up with *Original Sin*, a polemical response to John Taylor (1694-1761), whose *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin*, an anti-Calvinist work, became popular in England as well in New England in the 1740s.⁵¹⁸ Edwards's philosophical treatises, often referred to as the *Two Dissertations*, became *The End for Which God Created the World* and *The Nature of True Virtue*, which were nearly finished by 1757, but published posthumously.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of That Freedom of Will* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1754).

⁵¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1758). John Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to Free and Careful Examination* (London, 1738). See Paul Ramsey, editor's introduction to *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1, Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 70.

⁵¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Two dissertations, I. Concerning the end for which God created the world. II. The nature of true virtue* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1765).

The overarching goal of Edwards's writing output during the Stockbridge years was to reestablish and defend a God-centered religion from what he considered to be a trend toward a human-centered, humanistic religion. Perhaps this was the main reason why Edwards decided to leave the frontier of Stockbridge to take up the offer to serve as president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) after the unexpected death of his son-in-law, Aaron Burr Sr. Tragically, only a few months into his tenure Edwards passed away from complications of a smallpox inoculation. Edwards's great unfinished work was in part an effort to adjudicate between human reason and God's revelation. *A History of the Work of Redemption* would put Revelation at the forefront of God's redemptive narrative. We will now turn to the major themes of Edwards's historical-redemptive apocalypticism through a close examination of *HWR*.

A History of the Work of Redemption

We have come to a point where we can try to parse Edwards's apocalyptic thought in greater depth. Much of the apocalyptic themes he explored throughout his life can be gleaned through a close reading of *HWR* and its collorary cross-references in the "Miscellanies," the "Blank Bible," and *Notes on the Apocalypse*. Along with the treatises that have already been explored, mainly *Some Thoughts* and the *Humble Attempt*, these apocalyptic texts serve to underscore Edwards's historical-redemptive apocalypticism that influenced several generations of evangelical church leaders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Since Edwards died before finishing his masterwork of eschatology, it was up to his son, Jonathan Edwards Jr., to eventually prepare the manuscript for publication in 1774 through a close correspondent of

Edwards, John Erskine of Scotland.⁵²⁰ Initial critical reception to the work was lukewarm. A review from London was quite telling:

With respect to these outlines of a *new* body of divinity, as something will doubtless be expected from us concerning the Work, we must declare it—a long, laboured, dull, confused rhapsody; and far from being in a method entirely new, it is merely an attempt to revive the old mystical divinity that distracted the last age with pious conundrums: and which, having, long ago, emigrated to America, we have no reason to wish should ever be imported back again.⁵²¹

This criticism revealed the developing chasm between Old World Enlightenment thinking and a leading New World Puritan theology. Edwards's *HWR* fit neither the new methods of the increasing secularization of history nor the emerging liberal hermeneutics of theology and biblical exegesis. Instead of a new method, the critic was right that Edwards's work did harken back to the spiritual or "mystical" *a priori* assumptions of the church fathers, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the magisterial Reformers. The review also captured the essence of the work, which was the "pious conundrums," a thinly-veiled euphemistic mockery of the millennial speculations of Edwards. He was written off as "a poor departed enthusiast" and the work considered "nonsense."⁵²² The condescending tone and outright ridicule were apt for the times where growing sophistication in reason challenged all forms of knowledge, including religion. Given the paradigm shift of Enlightenment thinking, the criticism of Edwards and this work never disappeared. Most

⁵²⁰ Wilson, editor's introduction to WJE 9:21-22. The publication was secured in Scotland due to a general lack of interest in the work stateside.

⁵²¹ *Monthly Review*, 52 (London, 1775). Excerpted in Wilson, editor's introduction to WJE 9:86.

⁵²² Wilson, editor's introduction to WJE 9:87.

likely due to Edwards's enthusiasm for eschatological reflection, even twentieth-century scholars sympathetic to Edwards like Perry Miller and Alan Heimert sheepishly defended the work as a provincial text written for the localized situation of the moment.⁵²³ But Edwards's own promotion of it, referring to it as "a great work" and "a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into a form of a history," suggests a far more ambitious project.⁵²⁴ It could be seen as a valiant effort to stem the tide of encroaching Enlightenment thought by affirming and eschatologically validating what Avihu Zakai calls the "re-enchantment of the world."⁵²⁵

What Edwards meant by "history" in the work of redemption provides the scope of the project where he described the content as "being thrown into a form of a history." While John F. Wilson suggests that primarily what Edwards meant by history was theological, Harry Stout writes that Edwards saw history as "mythic, divine time," providing the metanarrative structure necessary for a story of redemption in "cosmic, virtual time."⁵²⁶ Stout argues that Edwards's program would not have worked as a systematic theology, but only as a narrative, "the greatest story ever told."⁵²⁷ It was the "epic quality" of the narrative that made *HWR* a popular work of cultural importance.⁵²⁸

⁵²³ Zakai, *Re-enchantment of the World*, 8. Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 315-18.

⁵²⁴ Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards*, 569.

⁵²⁵ Zakai, *Re-enchantment of the World*, 8.

⁵²⁶ Wilson, editor's introduction to WJE 9:2. Stout, "Edwards the Revivalist," 127.

⁵²⁷ Stout, editor's introduction to WJE 22:11-12.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

It seems Edwards was subsuming history under the weight of the work of redemption as though it was a tool for its advancement. The “entirely new method” was Edwards’s efforts at a synthesis, perhaps not unlike trying to unite all the forces of physics into a unified theory of everything. E. Brooks Holifield writes that Edwards “found in the Bible the clues to a ‘Grand design’ that would bring all the world’s diversity into a final unity.”⁵²⁹ And it was this “historical sense” that fueled Edwards’s investment in his cosmic apocalypticism where “he occupied himself with attempts to map the course of history toward the millennium and the creation of the ‘new heaven and new earth.’”⁵³⁰ There was not a more sensible exercise to Edwards than his pleasure in working through the meaning and significance of the end of redemption history.

In the nineteenth century, the pioneering historian George Bancroft explained Edwards’s efforts to intertwine history and redemption by affirming that “historic truth” corresponded to “become the highest demonstration of the superintending providence of God.”⁵³¹ It was not until the twentieth century, however, that the idea of the providence of God ceased to be an organizing principle of religious history. Perry Miller, in wanting to recognize Edwards as a modernist ahead of his time, acknowledged the importance of *HWR*, but only after demythologizing and stripping it of its eschatological context did he bestow upon Edwards’s proposed masterwork the earmarks of the modern historical

⁵²⁹ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 122.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ George Bancroft, *History of the United States* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1840), 398. Quoted in Wilson, editor’s introduction to WJE 9:89.

method, stating: “But had he done this much, he would then have furnished America with the first glimmerings of historical method, which, even though lacking the scholarship to support it, would still have been, in the reckoning of today, an immense enrichment of the intellectual heritage of the nation.”⁵³² In the middle of the twentieth century scholars mostly followed Miller’s lead in either taking the supernatural out of Edwards or just plainly ignoring the Edwards of the *HWR*.⁵³³ An early effort to paint Edwards as a modern described him thus: “He was, one might fancy, formed by nature to a German professor, and accidentally dropped into the American forests.”⁵³⁴ What Edwards attempted to do in *HWR* was, I argue, even more ambitious than the modern historical method or even a “re-enchantment of the world.” His plan was no less than to reveal as much as humanly possible the glory, sovereignty, and providence of a Trinitarian God. The best way to do this was through the unveiling of God’s plan of redemption primarily as revealed in Revelation. Edwards wrote regarding biblical revelation:

Here we are shown the connection of the various parts of the work of providence, and shown how all is harmonized and is connected together as a regular, beautiful, and glorious frame. In the Bible we have an account of the whole scheme of providence from the beginning of the world to the end of it either in history or prophecy, and are told what will both become of things at last, how they will [be] finished off by a great [day] of judgment, and [what] will issue in the subduing of all God’s enemies, and salvation and glory of his church, and setting [up] the everlasting kingdom of his Son.⁵³⁵

⁵³² Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 309.

⁵³³ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 7-10.

⁵³⁴ Quoted in Michael J. McClymond, “‘A German Professor Dropped into the American Forests’: British, French and German Views of Jonathan Edwards, 1758-1957,” in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 209.

⁵³⁵ *History of the Work of Redemption*, in WJE 9:522.

The Coming of the Kingdom of Christ

One of the great themes of HWR is about the coming kingdom of Christ. This touches upon all three elements of Edward’s historical-redemptive apocalypticism: revivalistic, afflictive, and cosmic. The coming kingdom of Christ was advanced through increasingly effective revivals resulting in mass conversions. The coming kingdom of Christ was afflictive, requiring periods of convulsions as well as conversions. And it was cosmic in that the framework of Edwards’s history reveals not only the textual differences between the eternal and transitory in Isaiah 51:8 (the main text of the Redemption Discourse), but highlights the dialectic between the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan—the cosmic battle between the Lord’s army versus Satan and the Antichrist gives history its apocalyptic edge.⁵³⁶ Overall, Edwards sought to elevate “Christ” in his conception of the coming kingdom. Edwards emphasized the Christological focus of history by decrying the elevation of the history of great men yet undermining God’s history, saying, “shall we not prize the history that God has given us of the glorious kingdom of his son, Jesus Christ, the prince and savior of the world, and the wars and other great transactions of that king of kings and lord of armies, the lord mighty in battle, the history of the things he has wrought for the redemption of his chosen people.”⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ Wilson, editor’s introduction to WJE 9:38.

⁵³⁷ *History of the Work of Redemption*, in WJE 9:291. Edwards cites figures such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and the Duke of Marlborough as great men of history.

The coming kingdom of Christ would advance in stages. For Edwards, history from the fall of humanity to the end of the world could be understood by periods or dispensations. The Old Testament references to “the latter days” and “the last days” were “the last period of the series of God's providences on earth.”⁵³⁸ Interestingly, Edwards linked the Old Testament references to the New Testament text, 1 Corinthians 10:11 where the Apostle Paul wrote: “Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (AV). Edwards explained, “The world’s thus, as it were, coming to end by various steps and degrees is perhaps the reason why the Apostle says that the ‘ends of the world’ are come on us; not the end but the ends, of the plural number, as though the world has several endings one after another.”⁵³⁹ Edwards described this period of the multiple “ends of the world” as a series of preparatory beginnings and prophetic endings by “various steps and degrees,” in the historical process of the setting up the kingdom of Christ, wherein he outlines “four great, successive dispensations of providence, and every one of them is represented in Scripture as Christ's coming,” each consisting of an advancement and an accompanied destruction.⁵⁴⁰ The first dispensation of Christ’s coming was in his incarnation in the days of the Apostles, where he set up the kingdom of Christ, in part, by destroying Jerusalem, the temple system, and “the carnal ordinances of the Jewish

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 346.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 348.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 348, 351, 352.

worship.”⁵⁴¹ The second was the setting up of the kingdom of Christ through Christendom in the period of Constantine, with the resultant destruction of the heathen Roman empire, which was prophesized in Revelation 6; the third would be the destruction of the Antichrist as depicted in Daniel 7; and the fourth and final dispensation is Christ’s coming at the last judgment.⁵⁴²

In Edwards’s framework of the history of redemption each kingdom event contained its own little histories of tumult and revival. Edwards saw himself as being in the premillennial period before the third coming of Christ at the destruction of the Antichrist.⁵⁴³ According to Edwards it was this premillennial period that he was referring to in *Some Thoughts* when he wrote that the “glorious work of God” might begin in America.⁵⁴⁴ This was not to be confused with Edwards’s reference to the millennium as “the future glorious times of the church.”⁵⁴⁵ In Edwards’s chronology the premillennial time is characterized by revivals and a proliferation of gospel preaching. Edwards thus interpreted the Great Awakening in this light and expected an even greater work of God in a worldwide revival. However great these revivals would be, Edwards never wavered from his conviction that it will be the coming spirit of Christ that will ultimately bring on the millennium, as only this spirit had the power to destroy the three main Antichrists—

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 347.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 351.

⁵⁴³ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 77. Chamberlain, editor’s introduction to WJE 18:35.

⁵⁴⁴ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 83.

⁵⁴⁵ *History of the Work of Redemption*, in WJE 9:470.

the Roman church, the Mohammedan kingdom, and Jewish infidelity.⁵⁴⁶ As for the latter, “Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews is in the eleventh chapter or Romans,” wrote Edwards.⁵⁴⁷ The redeemed Jewish people of the ten scattered tribes will enter the millennium as one people as they were once one under the reigns of David and Solomon.⁵⁴⁸ On the future of the Jews Edwards wrote:

Though we don't know the time in which this conversion of the nation of Israel will come to pass, yet this much we may determine by Scripture, that it will [be] before [the] glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished, because it is said that their coming in shall be life from the dead to the Gentiles, Romans 11:12, 15 ["Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world ... how much more their fulness [*sic*]? ... For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"].⁵⁴⁹

As Edwards tended to see God working in harmony and proportion he believed in accordance with the principle of the “equal distribution of things” that “since Gentiles received the gospel from the Jews, the Jews will receive the gospel from Gentiles,” however, in another role reversal, the national conversion of the Jews would in turn contribute to the prophetic fulfillment of the fullness of the Gentiles.⁵⁵⁰

While Edwards never wrote a treatise on Jewish conversion like Increase Mather or made special effort to convert the Jews like Cotton Mather, he was nevertheless convinced that the reception of the Jews of the gospel would be one of the surest signs of

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 467.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 469.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 470.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival*, in WJE 4:354-355.

the coming kingdom of Christ. His investment in the fate of Israel was due to his belief it was a crucial part of the cosmic narrative of redemption. As a young pastor in New York Edwards recalled living next to a Jewish neighbor who appeared to be “the devoutest person that I ever saw in my life.”⁵⁵¹ But for Edwards this was just another clue in the larger narrative of Christ abrogating the old system of ritualistic religion. Edwards made a lifelong effort to connect the different pieces of the puzzle of this bigger picture. Intuitively he saw the Jews and their language and history to be front and center in this endeavor. In the letter to the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in regard to the presidency, Edwards expressed his desire to write *A History of the Work of Redemption* and the companion volume, *The Harmony of the Old and New Testament*, but also to teach “the Hebrew tongue.”⁵⁵² For Edwards, Hebrew held the key to understanding not only the unity of the Old and New Testaments, but of all divine things.⁵⁵³ This was part of Edwards’s overall view of reality—that all things on earth were a type of a greater spiritual reality. “I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things...” Edwards wrote.⁵⁵⁴ Toward this end Edwards studiously

⁵⁵¹ *Religious Affections*, in WJE 2:165. Edward was writing in the context of showing examples of outwardly devotion not necessarily being evidence of a genuine, inward faith.

⁵⁵² To the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, October 19, 1757, in WJE: 16: 729. See also Shalom Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 74.

⁵⁵³ Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 88.

⁵⁵⁴ “Types,” in WJE 11:152. Quoted in Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111.

followed nearly every typological lead regarding Israel and the Jews and even dabbled in Jewish mystical texts and Christian Kabbalism for typological insights.⁵⁵⁵

For Edwards, the millennium itself was just another stage, a type and a foretaste in preparation for the New Heaven and New Earth.⁵⁵⁶ Edwards was not sure whether to take the thousand year duration literally or figuratively, but regardless he believed it would be close to a thousand years but not any longer.⁵⁵⁷ Edwards's reasoning was quite practical. The prospering of the world for such a duration would lead to a population boom, though that will not necessarily increase the already preordained number of the elect; however, they would come into the kingdom in proper proportion.⁵⁵⁸ As a reflection of his practical theology Edwards thought that in a thousand years, "God's people would be under great temptation not to behave themselves as pilgrims and strangers on earth, forget to live as not of the world and to lay up treasure in heaven."⁵⁵⁹ Edwards had much experience in the intervening years between revivals with spiritual backsliding and the sinner's tendency toward complacency. Toward the end of the millennium this spiritual lethargy would manifest itself, as Edwards wrote, "tis very likely that towards the latter part of it they will begin to grow insensible of it, and so

⁵⁵⁵ Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue*, 87. For word studies of Edwards and Hebrew, see Linda Munk, "His Dazzling Absence: The Shekinah in Jonathan Edwards," *Early American Literature* 27, no. 1 (1992): 1-30. Through an in-depth study of the Hebrew word "Shekinah" in Edwards's works, Munk makes a compelling case that Edwards was far more immersed in Hebrew studies than is typically acknowledged.

⁵⁵⁶ "Miscellanies," no. 836, in WJE 20:52.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51. See also *Humble Attempt*, in WJE 5:342-343.

⁵⁵⁹ "Miscellanies," no. 1224, in WJE 23:156.

pride will begin to come in, and this will be one great occasion of that apostasy of Gog and Magog [Revelation 20:8].”⁵⁶⁰

Although Edwards always proclaimed a triumphant eschatology—that ultimately Christ would be victorious in the end—he never expressed much of an anthropological optimism, firmly holding onto the belief in original sin and the fallen nature of human beings. For Edwards even the great tribulations the Church would have to endure and the short apostasy toward the end of the millennium were just reminders of the great cost of the work of redemption. That is why the millennium was always future-oriented, so that the Church could sharpen faith, to learn to hope, to pray, and to anticipate the time of Christ’s reign.⁵⁶¹ After the final apostasy and near the close of the millennium, Christ would finally appear in the glory of his resurrected body to wage the final war against Satan. With his ultimate victory Christ would judge the world and inaugurate his kingdom over the New Jerusalem and institute the New Heaven and a New Earth where Christ and his Church finally fulfill the prophesied consummation.

Distinguishing himself from strains of premillennialism and millennial literalists such as Increase and Cotton Mather, Edwards believed Christ’s reign during the millennium would be spiritual, not physical.⁵⁶² He argued: “It is a greater privilege to the church on earth to have Christ, her head and Redeemer, in heaven at the right hand of God, than for him to be in this lower world: for Christ in heaven is in his glorious throne.

⁵⁶⁰ “Miscellanies,” no. 836, in WJE 20:52.

⁵⁶¹ “Miscellanies,” no. 351, in WJE 13:427.

⁵⁶² “Miscellanies,” no. 827, in WJE 18:537.

For him to come down to this earth to dwell here, would be a second humiliation, a descending from an higher glory to a lower.”⁵⁶³ Edwards thought that Christ reigning on earth by his spirit would be more glorious and happy for the church as the role of the presence of the “Comforter” was the reason for his ascension.⁵⁶⁴ The martyrs who were beheaded in Revelation 20 would also reign spiritually with Christ in heaven in the “first resurrection” (a spiritual resurrection) whereas “the rest of the dead” would live again only after the millennial period.⁵⁶⁵ While the “first death” is natural, the “second death” (both spiritual and eternal death) in verse 6 of Revelation 20 is for Edwards a repetition of God harkening back to Genesis 2:17, where God warned Adam, “Dying thou shalt die.”⁵⁶⁶ Edwards was keen to connect the final chapters of Revelation with Genesis, seeing the “tree of life” and the river running through paradise in Revelation 22 as befitting the Alpha and Omega of God’s revelation.⁵⁶⁷ As the wheel of divine providence in Ezekiel 1 was one of his favorite typological metaphors, Edwards gloried in finding symmetries and typological references coming full circle.⁵⁶⁸

Edwards took great lengths to describe the various contours of the millennium. In part this was to provide both a hope and a rebuke to the church. The millennium would be

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 537-538.

⁵⁶⁵ “Blank Bible,” notes on Revelation, in WJE 24:1241. *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:144-145.

⁵⁶⁶ “Blank Bible” note on Revelation, in WJE 24:1241.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:145.

a time of the happy state of the church. For Edwards the fundamental character of this state was a proliferation of knowledge, “when neither divine nor human learning shall be confined and imprisoned within only two or three nations of Europe, but shall be diffused all over the world,” a time “when the most barbarous nations shall become as bright and polite as England,” with pleasant surprises where “sometimes new and wondrous discoveries from Terra Australis Incognita, admirable books of devotion, the most divine and angelic strains from among the Hottentots, and the press shall groan in wild Tartary.”⁵⁶⁹ For Edwards the millennium would manifest God’s wisdom that the last shall be first. Terra Australis Incognita, Hottentots, and Tartary were all places and people groups representing the farthest, uttermost, or the least in both physical and informational distance.

In the millennium the nations of the world would continue to exist but there was to be a worldwide adoption of a moral government based on theocratic principles of true liberty and personal freedom as embodied in the prophetic passage in Micah 4:4 “wherein every man shall sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree.”⁵⁷⁰ The millennium would affect every aspect of worldwide economies, trade, commerce, travel, science, arts and leisure. Edwards wrote:

Tis probable that this world shall be more like heaven in the millennium in this respect, that contemplative and spiritual employments, and those

⁵⁶⁹ “Miscellanies,” no. 26, in WJE 13:212. Terra Australis Incognita refers to a hypothetical third continent (Old World and New World being the other two) somewhere in the South. Edwards placed it in a geographically strategic location between Europe, Asia, and Africa from where access to all parts of the world was easiest. See *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:133. Hottentots refers to a people group in Africa and Tartars, the Mongol people in Asia.

⁵⁷⁰ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:137.

things that more directly concern the mind and religion, will be more the saints' ordinary business than now. There will be so many contrivances and inventions to facilitate and expedite their necessary secular business, that they shall have more time for more noble exercises, and that they will have better contrivances for assisting one another through the whole earth, by a more expedite and easy and safe communication between distant regions than now.⁵⁷¹

Indeed, the world would come together in a new-found globalization where “all the arts and the arts of communication shall be carried to the highest perfection, with the establishment of “a universal communication between all part of the world.”⁵⁷² This would fulfill God’s vision, that “the whole earth may be as one community, one body in Christ.”⁵⁷³

The Agony and the Ecstasy: Examining Edwards’s Postmillennialism

Ever since C.C. Goen’s “new departure” article in 1959 Edwards’s reputation as the leading light of postmillennialist optimism has contributed to the persistent legacy that his apocalyptic thought was instrumental to the advancement of nineteenth-century revivalism and missions. Even George Marsden wonders in his comprehensive biography of Edwards if his most enduring influence might be his optimistic eschatology.⁵⁷⁴ But Edwards predated later understandings of postmillennialism, which in American Christianity developed gradually without a clear author or origin. Postmillennialism is characterized by an optimistic view of the future and the idea of the progress of history,

⁵⁷¹ “Miscellanies,” no. 262, in WJE 13:369.

⁵⁷² “Miscellanies,” no. 835, in WJE 20:49.

⁵⁷³ “Miscellanies,” no. 262, in WJE 13:369.

⁵⁷⁴ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 415.

with the task of the church in “Christianizing” the world as part of the progression of God’s work during the millennial age, which would help usher in the return of Christ after a thousand-year period. In contrast, premillennialism is characterized by seeing disaster, persecution, and tribulation as preceding the Second Coming of Christ, which would then inaugurate the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.

Edwards’s postmillennialist stance might compare to Calvin’s on predestination in that although predestination was not Calvin’s chief theological concern, over time it became one of the defining topics of his Reformed position. Likewise, Edwards’s postmillennialism, as an issue of the timing of Christ’s return, was not at the forefront of his apocalyptic thought, but only later became one of the main distinguishing points of his eschatology. Postmillennialism’s gradual acceptance by orthodox Protestant theologians of the late eighteenth century attests to the intellectual shifts happening at the turn of the century. The philosophies of John Locke (1632-1704), Thomas Reid (1710-1796), David Hume (1711-1776), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) had paved the road for leading American thinkers toward a mix of empiricism, Scottish Common-Sense realism, skepticism, and idealism respectively.⁵⁷⁵ Within theology, postmillennialism became historically identified with the advancing optimism of the same period. Following Goen, a number of studies began to explore the dichotomies and particularities of the premillennial and postmillennial outlook. Scholars like Ernest Tuveson in *Redeemer Nation* and Alan Heimert in *Religion and the American Mind* generally

⁵⁷⁵ Kulick, *Churchmen and Philosophers*, 117-138.

associated postmillennialism with hopeful optimism and premillennialism with a withdrawn pessimism.⁵⁷⁶

As postmillennial thought became a clear and coherent theological position by the late 1780s, much of the debate in the nineteenth century centered around whether Christ's return will be a literal, physical reality—a mostly premillennial stance—as opposed to a more spiritualized return, a position adopted more so by postmillennialists.⁵⁷⁷ Although there were clear polarizations between the two camps based on theological, intellectual, and even political considerations, reading these nineteenth-century debates back into Edwards's millennialism is anachronistic. Although most scholars continue to identify Edwards as a postmillennialist or at least a proto-postmillennialist, Edwards himself would have most likely questioned the usefulness of such labels. As Stephen Stein writes, “they imply too rigid a set of opposing assumptions.”⁵⁷⁸ James Davidson also argues persuasively against the dichotomy of seeing Edwards's or any Puritan's eschatology as an either/or category between “pessimistic catastrophism and optimistic progressivism.”⁵⁷⁹ Edwards, like most Puritans who closely watched for the end times, toggled between both.

⁵⁷⁶ Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 26-51. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 59-94.

⁵⁷⁷ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 132.

⁵⁷⁸ Stein, editor's introduction in WJE 5:7n6. See also Davidson, “Searching for the Millennium, 241-261. Also see Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 43-44.

⁵⁷⁹ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 138.

Like most Puritan commentators on the millennium, Edwards believed that it was to be a physical and temporal reality. Edwards's commentary on Romans 11 saw parallels between the spiritual and bodily resurrection to that of the redemption of spiritual Israel being manifested through the restoration of literal Israel: "not only shall the spiritual state of the Jews be hereafter restored, but their external state in a nation, in their own land."⁵⁸⁰ But Edwards reasoned that other temporal powers must first be vanquished. For if popish kings and kingly popes remained there would be no rest or sabbatism because there would be various competing powers. Just as the seventh day of creation brought rest, the thousand years of the millennium would bring peace and rest.⁵⁸¹ For that to happen there needed to be a "Revolution" that would be greater than that of the "earthquake" of Constantine the Great's conversion.⁵⁸² These revolutions would be part of the great conversion of the world; only then would the millennium begin. All the struggles of the church were in preparation for entrance into the seventh and final millennia. Edwards continued:

What the church has from Christ's time till now been travailing, has been the conversion of all nations, and the setting up the kingdom of him who is the rightful heir of the world through the world of mankind." And as long as the church still remains struggling and laboring, to bring to pass this effect, her travail ceases not; as doubtless she will not cease continually to labor for it, till the kingdom of Christ is set up everywhere. As long as [a] great part of the world yet remains under Satan's dominion in popery, Mahometanism, Judaism or heathenism, the church will still continue laboring to accomplish this effect, and won't rest, till all parts of Satan's kingdom are overthrown, and the kingdom of Christ everywhere

⁵⁸⁰ "Blank Bible," note on Romans, in WJE 24:1028.

⁵⁸¹ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:129.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 177.

established. And then will be her rest or sabbatism; and then will be her song of praise, which will last a thousand years.⁵⁸³

It is true Edwards displayed an unshakeable hope in the future redemption of individuals, people groups, and principalities. In due time, agony would certainly lead to ecstasy. But Edwards always acknowledged difficult times ahead for the church. Edwards believed, for example, that although the slaying of the witnesses was long past and that the worst persecutions facing the church were over, he was not “optimistic” as a matter of eschatological orientation and was often just as “pessimistic” as those who consistently foresaw troubled times in the future.⁵⁸⁴ Edwards acknowledged that from its very beginning to the time of the millennium, the church was to be constantly in a state of warfare; triumph and peace could not come until all her enemies were subdued just as Israel enjoyed Sabbath rest after crossing the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was drowned.⁵⁸⁵ The battle of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39 would precede the millennium and Edwards equated it with the battle in Revelation Chapters 16 and 19.⁵⁸⁶ Edwards never failed to articulate his belief that until the Antichrist and Satan’s authority were completely vanquished, times of darkness would follow times of light.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 178.

⁵⁸⁴ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 415. See also Burr, *Sermon Before the Synod of New York*, 26.

⁵⁸⁵ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:179.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 205n1.

The various data points from Edwards's own experiences through the agonies and ecstasies of revivals and declensions seemed to have confirmed this afflictive apocalyptic pattern. Davidson correctly locates the morphology of conversion as one of the lenses through which to view Edwards's mix of pessimistic agonizing and optimistic ecstasy. He writes that the work of redemption "recapitulated the smaller repetitions of the pattern with its final struggle at Armageddon against the massed forces of antichrist, and even beyond that, the ultimate battle against *Gog* and *Magog*, when the church had stumbled at the end of the millennium."⁵⁸⁷ In other words, individual conversion was a microcosm of bigger battles ahead.⁵⁸⁸ Just as in the mystery of conversion, Edwards's optimism was based on the confidence he had on the ultimate victory of God, not on the progressive nature of humankind.

The Language of Apocalypticism

The very language of Revelation was a key factor in *HWR* and is reflective of the dimensions of Edwards's dynamic, creative, and cosmic apocalypticism. Like a good Puritan, Edwards mostly read the text of Revelation historically and literally. But for Edwards the abstract symbolism and spiritual conundrums were not frustratingly abstruse. Instead, they helped make sense of the complex events of his time and gave solace to things unfolding in his own personal life. Edwards was most in his element when engaging in the language of apocalyptic typology. Typology was standard fare for

⁵⁸⁷ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 136-137.

⁵⁸⁸ Chamberlain, editor's introduction to WJE 18:35.

Puritan writers. Sacvan Bercovitch notes the importance of scriptural typology, the use of the religious imagination, and the centrality of the text (both religious and civic) in the Puritan mindset.⁵⁸⁹ John F. Wilson suggests that for Puritan scriptural literalists, typology was a liberating tool of interpretation.⁵⁹⁰ Edwards used typological language as a sort of code to unlock the mysteries of a series of types. Connecting a series of apocalyptic typologies was sustenance to his imaginative soul.

Edwards's conversion/redemptive narrative was highly Christological. A favorite typological tool of his was to point to the various places in scripture that pointed to Christ. Perhaps more so than his fellow Puritan divines Edwards was prepared to go much further than others in the use of typology because he was willing to go as far as the breadth, depth, and heights of his apocalyptic speculation would take him.⁵⁹¹ In one of his most interesting and creative examples Edwards compared Sampson and the glorious future of the church. Just as on the seventh day Sampson told his wife the riddle, so Christ would reveal the mystery of the fullness of time in the latter day, "and will most fully reveal it in the seventh thousand year of the world"; just as the people "learned the riddle by plowing with Sampson's heifer" and conversing with his wife, so the church learns by the teachings of the church and by conversing with the saints; and just as "Sampson's companions won change of raiment by explaining the riddle," so do "believers obtain spiritual change of raiment—by a saving knowledge of the mystery of

⁵⁸⁹ Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, 96.

⁵⁹⁰ Wilson, editor's introduction to WJE 9:47.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*

the gospel.”⁵⁹² While others took New Testament typology to be predictive, Edwards expanded the possibilities of typology to include the Christian church and even in the signs of the natural world.⁵⁹³ Mason Lowance and David Watters summarize Edwards’s apocalyptic typology succinctly, writing, “Through the system of types instituted by God and governed by providence, which prefigured the ultimate antitype, Christ and his kingdom, not only could human history be explained; indeed, future events could be predicted and the time of the second coming could be established in the future scheme of historical events.”⁵⁹⁴

Edwards description of the millennium was biblical and expressed his ecclesiastical concerns more so than utopian or political considerations. Edwards employed the language of aesthetics toward this end in explaining the apocalyptic, and he used apocalyptic terms to inform his aesthetical, cosmic theology. It was for Edwards a natural symbiotic relationship. This aesthetical apocalyptic language is most evident in his depiction of the millennial age. He wrote of the millennial period as, “A time of excellent order in the church discipline and government [shall] be settled in his church; all the world [shall then be] as one church, one orderly, regular, beautiful society, one body, all the members in beautiful proportion.”⁵⁹⁵ Edwards preached in *Charity and Its Fruits*

⁵⁹² The “Blank Bible,” notes on Judges, in WJE 24:337. This is only a sampling of the many parallels and typologies Edwards finds.

⁵⁹³ Wilson, editor’s introduction to WJE 9:47.

⁵⁹⁴ Mason Lowance and David Watters, editors’ introduction to “Types of Messiah,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 11, Typological Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance Jr. and David Watters (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 162.

⁵⁹⁵ *History of the Work of Redemption*, in WJE 9:484.

(1738), a sermon series he preached right before the Redemption Discourse, that the millennial age will not be characterized by prophets, speaking in tongues, and the working of miracles, but rather the Spirit of God would be poured out in the “more excellent way” described by Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.⁵⁹⁶ This was undoubtedly a warning to the radical enthusiasts of the Awakening. But it also reads like a prophetic rebuke to Northampton, whose rejection of Edwards’s vision of church discipline and government led not to one body in beautiful proportion but an ugly fracturing.

Edwards’s God was a God of harmony. While the old creation took six days, the new creation had been advancing since Christ’s resurrection, continuing to be made ready until the end of the world. This was evidence that God “hath been pleased to put so much greater honor and dignity on the new creation than he did the old.”⁵⁹⁷ Just as the millennium was a physical reality the eternal period of the New heaven and New earth was as well. Edwards maintained that we do not know its constitution, but since the new heaven and a new earth will be at the same time a restoration as well as a new creation, it would be wholly different “materially as well in form.”⁵⁹⁸ What Edwards meant by this is not entirely clear but in one of his earlier notes about the new heaven and new earth he wrote that in scripture there are mentions of a “final departure of the stars, as well as the sun and moon; so that the heavens shall be new in all regards.”⁵⁹⁹ Edwards continued

⁵⁹⁶ *Charity and Its Fruits*, in WJE 7:361.

⁵⁹⁷ “Miscellanies,” no. 807, in WJE 18:510.

⁵⁹⁸ *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:141.

⁵⁹⁹ “Miscellanies,” no. 133 (148), in WJE 13:294.

with the theme of harmony and proportion. Regarding resurrected bodies, he wrote: “the beauty of the bodies of saints in the new earth, the new Jerusalem, shall not only consist in the most charming proportion of features and parts of their bodies, and their light and proportion of colors, but much in the manifestation of the excellencies of their mind.”⁶⁰⁰

The eschatological goal of the work of redemption was the consummation of Christ and the church. Edwards described the thousand-year reign of Christ as the time of preparation for the marriage day and wedding feast. Edwards saved his most rhapsodic aesthetical apocalyptic language in a detailed account of his controlling motif of Christ obtaining a spouse:

...and Christ shall come and present his church, now perfectly redeemed, to the Father, saying, Here am I, and the children that thou hast given me. And having thus finished all the work that the Father had given him to do, he shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father. Then shall the Father, with infinite manifestations of endearment and delight, testify his acceptance of Christ and of his church thus presented to him, and his infinite acquiescence of what his Son has done, and complacence in him and his spouse, and in reward shall now give them the joys of their eternal wedding. And he himself will dress his Son in his wedding robe...to this end God the Father will now crown him with a crown of love, and array him in the brightest robes of love and grace as his wedding garments, as the robe in which he should embrace his dear redeemed spouse, now brought home to her everlasting rest in the house of her husband.⁶⁰¹

The consummation would effect a heavenly transformation of the bride, finally made worthy of the eternal abode. Edwards continued:

...the glory will be communicated from him to his bride, and she shall be transformed into his image by beholding him, or by his sweet shining and smiling upon her. And at that time will be the transformation of all heaven, and it will become a new heaven...Thus Christ and his saints both

⁶⁰⁰ “Miscellanies,” no. 149 (139), in WJE 13:301.

⁶⁰¹ “Miscellanies,” no. 959, in WJE 20:231-232.

shall receive their consummate felicity and full reward, and shall begin the eternal feast of love, the eternal embraces and the eternal joys of that marriage of the Lamb.⁶⁰²

Chapter Conclusion

Edwards's overall legacy could have been on a similar path to Cotton Mather's, a Puritan historical curiosity of his time and generation. After Edwards's death it was not even his theological works but the *Life of David Brainerd* that had the greatest cultural impact.⁶⁰³ Edwards's apocalyptic thought, in particular, could have been easily overlooked was it not for the burst of millennial interest in the 1790s, which rehabilitated Edwards's writings from the dustbin of history.⁶⁰⁴ Edwards's *HWR* became an influential theological text during this time. But from the 1850s, nearly a decade removed from the closing of the Second Great Awakening, the influence of Edwards was already on the wane. For nearly a century afterward Jonathan Edwards was not a subject of academic interest. But through the works of a handful of influential scholars, by the 1940s and 50s the recovery of Edwards's legacy was under way. But in most academic circles Edwards was largely viewed as a philosopher theologian. His more metaphysical, philosophically-oriented publications such as the *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765) were highlighted, I believe, in part because these works were not overtly apocalyptic. But throughout the last decade of his life Edwards was still making entries

⁶⁰² Ibid., 232-233.

⁶⁰³ Pettit, editor's introduction to WJE 7:3-4. *The Life of David Brainerd* was one of the first biographies written in America that was influential abroad, inspiring countless missionaries.

⁶⁰⁴ Wilson, editor's introduction to WJE 9:81.

in his *Notes the Apocalypse* and working toward a convergence of his apocalyptic thoughts.⁶⁰⁵

Before his move to Princeton he was working on what he considered to be a culmination of his life of study, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, along with a companion piece, *The Harmony of the Old and New Testaments*. Edwards sought to incorporate notes from his lifelong study of the Bible, theology, history, and philosophy into a historical-redemptive narrative of the work of God. More so than his philosophical and ethical writings, the millennial themes of the *HWR* and the biblical exegesis of the *HONT* are far more representative of who Edwards was and what he emphasized in his life and ministry. To an extraordinary degree Edwards's preoccupation with the last things in the Bible was preserved in his writings. A detailed study reveals that Edwards never approached it systematically; *HWR* is the closest we have. The themes explored in *HWR* fits the outline of what I consider to be Edwards's historical-redemptive apocalypticism: revivalistic, afflictive, and cosmic. The term may be unwieldy but in a way it reflects the way in which Edwards tried to summarize the evidence of God's providence and sovereignty under the rubric of an overarching structure of a historical-redemptive narrative. In assessing Edwards's legacy, it would be instructive to not only evaluate *HWR* in light of his historical-redemptive apocalypticism, but also use it as a springboard for assessing the work of those whom he influenced. In the next chapter we will trace the Edwardsean elements of his apocalyptic thought in the eschatological works of his first generation disciples.

⁶⁰⁵ Stein, editor's introduction to WJE 5:50.

CHAPTER FOUR

The First Edwardseans and the Millennium

After the death of Edwards at the age of fifty-four, his two closest disciples, Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, took upon the task of preserving his legacy. In terms of sheer ability Bellamy might have been the most qualified to take up the mantle of Edwards.⁶⁰⁶ By temperament and spirituality Hopkins was probably a closer kindred soul to Edwards's overall religiosity.⁶⁰⁷ In combination they made a formidable pair in representing Edwardsean thought and spirituality to future generations. Their individual achievements were worthy of merit. But they are now primarily remembered for being Edwards's most direct spiritual and intellectual heirs, which of course is significant in its own right. What might not be as well-known is their deeply shared interest in eschatology. Although they largely retained the outlines of Edwards's apocalyptic thought, they adapted and shaped it for the crucial decades before and after the founding of America. They represent this transition from Edwards to his grandson, Timothy Dwight, as the main representative of the third generation.

For the purposes of the dissertation a brief summary of Bellamy and Hopkins's memoirs will be presented to provide the necessary historical context. It will then turn to an analysis of their contribution to the apocalyptic thought of New England evangelical

⁶⁰⁶ Tyron Edwards, "Memoir" in *The Works of Joseph Bellamy*, vol. 1 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853). Bellamy's *Works* heretofore referred as WJB, followed by volume and page number.

⁶⁰⁷ Edwards Amasa Park, "Memoir" in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 1 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865). Hopkins's *Works* heretofore referred as WSH, followed by volume and page number.

Calvinism, especially through a close reading of their most important apocalyptic works—Bellamy’s sermon, *The Millennium* (1758), and Hopkins’s *A Treatise on the Millennium* (1793).⁶⁰⁸ As the titles of the works suggest, both Bellamy and Hopkins were increasingly conscious of the real-world implications of building a holy and just nation and their societal concerns were intertwined with an increasing interest in the millennium and the “world to come.” Edwards himself used the term “millennium” sparingly, preferring instead to identify and describe the millennium in many different ways. By the time of Bellamy and Hopkins, however, the term “millennium” and its derivatives were used for all things related to the end times in much the same way as we use the word “eschatology” today. Thus, Bellamy and Hopkins’s “millennialism” or “millenarianism” would be equivalent to their apocalyptic thought.

The period flanked by the dates of Bellamy’s sermon on the millennium and Hopkins’s major treatise on the same subject was highlighted by three significant developments—the emergence of the New Divinity “school of theology” in New England, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution. These important historical events will serve as eschatological pathways toward examining the effects of an Edwardsean apocalyptic vision in pre- and post-Revolutionary America as filtered through Bellamy and Hopkins. Through them Edwards’s historical-redemptive apocalypticism continued to have an impact. First, the recovery of Edwardsean

⁶⁰⁸ Joseph Bellamy, *Sermons Upon the Following Subjects, viz. The Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Millenium [sic]. The Wisdom of God, in the Permission of Sin* (Boston: Edes and Gill and by S. Kneeland, 1758); and Samuel Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium. Showing from Scripture Prophecy, That it is Yet to Come; When it will Come; in What it Will Consist; and the Events Which are First to Take Place* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793).

apocalyptic thought in the 1790s contributed to the revivalism in the Second Great Awakening and maintained its emphasis on the primacy of conversion as the main catalyst for the coming millennial kingdom. Second, as a new nation emerged, deepening social issues took on millennial significance, thereby requiring a fresh eschatological critique on old social institutions such as slavery. Edwards's afflictive, apocalyptic outlook for the church and his willingness to critique it became a model through which American society could be judged. Overall, given the pressing social issues at hand in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Edwards's apocalyptic thought was made more concrete through Bellamy and Hopkins as they faced the difficult task of applying their mentor's teachings into practice. But as they prepared for the future through this apocalyptic turn toward the practical, the cosmic, more spiritualized apocalypticism of Edwards was challenged.

Joseph Bellamy

Joseph Bellamy was born in the town of Cheshire, CT on February 20, 1719.⁶⁰⁹ He graduated from Yale at the age of sixteen and by eighteen he was already a licensed preacher. Not much is known about the intervening years but by the end of 1736 he was at a certain point studying theology with Jonathan Edwards at Northampton as his first theological pupil.⁶¹⁰ While there are no surviving accounts of his conversion some written evidence points to a significant experience of deep conviction of his sin, whereby

⁶⁰⁹ Edwards, "Memoir" in WJB 1: ix. Biographical information will be primarily from this work.

⁶¹⁰ Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14.

afterward he devoted his life to a pursuit of ministry. Tyron Edwards, his memoirist, described his conversion by using a phrase from the old divines—“he had a thorough law-work,” to express the powerful combination of truth and grace that transformed his life.⁶¹¹ Edwards confirmed this thorough work of God in Bellamy by stating that his reflective student had a “very clear experience of his own soul.”⁶¹² Having recently turned twenty-one in 1740 Bellamy was installed as a pastor in Bethlehem, CT and began to earn a reputation as a powerful preacher and effective spiritual leader. Amidst the burgeoning Awakening in the early 1740s Bellamy was one of the most active revivalists in Connecticut with records showing that in a two-year period he preached four hundred and fifty-eight times in two hundred and thirteen places.⁶¹³

As one of the closest early confidants of Edwards, Bellamy was firmly imbedded in the constellation of New Light ministers and engaged in active ministry with many within Edwards’s sphere of influence, including Bellamy’s own classmates at Yale, Benjamin Pomeroy (1704-1784), Aaron Burr, Sr., and James Davenport, in addition to a close inner circle of Samuel Hopkins, David Brainerd, and Eleazar Wheelock, founder of Dartmouth College.⁶¹⁴ When Edwards was dismissed from his congregation in Northampton in 1750 the New Light Presbyterian minister Samuel Davies (1723-1761), the most renowned revivalist in the South, wrote to Bellamy urging him to persuade

⁶¹¹ Edwards, “Memoir,” in WJB 1: lii.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy’s New England*, 19.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

Edwards to take a position in Virginia, adding a caveat that in case he is unable to convince his teacher then “to come yourself.”⁶¹⁵ In this exchange we can see the high esteem afforded to Edwards after his dismissal, as well as the reputation of Bellamy as the next best thing to his mentor. Bellamy was certainly viewed by many as one of the main torchbearers for Edwardsean New Light revivalism. Bellamy’s affections and respect for Edwards might be captured in the simple act of naming his most favored son, Jonathan.⁶¹⁶

In the 1740s and 50s Bellamy followed Edwards in trying to navigate a consistent course between Arminianism and antinomianism. Toward this goal Bellamy published his most renowned work, *True Religion Delineated*, in 1750. The subtitle reflected his theological program of “Experimental Religion,” which sought to balance reason and the affections while distinguishing itself from the rigid formalism of Arminianism on the one hand and a disorderly enthusiasm on the other.⁶¹⁷ It became one of the most extensively read and studied works on Calvinism and established Bellamy’s reputation as a leading

⁶¹⁵ Edwards, “Memoir,” in WJB 1: xiv.

⁶¹⁶ Though his first two sons were named David and Jonathan, the latter was named in honor of his mentor. See Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy’s New England*, 141.

⁶¹⁷ Joseph Bellamy, *True Religion Delineated; or, Experimental Religion, as Distinguished from Formality on the one Hand, and Enthusiasm on the Other* (Boston, S. Kneeland, 1750). The full subtitle: *Experimental religion, as distinguished from formality on the one hand, and enthusiasm on the other, set in a scriptural and rational light. In two discourses. In which some of the principal errors both of the Arminians and Antinomians are confuted, the foundation and superstructure of their different schemes demolished, and the truth as it is in Jesus, explained and proved: The whole adapted to the weakest capacities, and designed for the establishment, comfort and quickening of the people of God, in these evil times.* Edwards main contention against Arminianism was its embrace of the freedom of the will as the human ability in self-determination. Bellamy focuses on the Arminian tendency to rely on formalism, or a set of doctrines, and to an over-reliance on human reason and common sense. On the other end of the spectrum was enthusiasm’s disregard of doctrinal norms.

Reformed theologian.⁶¹⁸ To his detractors Bellamy was seen as combative as he was unafraid to engage in the theological battles of the day.⁶¹⁹ He was one of the earliest supporters of Edwards's campaign to rid his congregation of the Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardeanism because he had undergone his own serious examination of the issues and concluded there was no scriptural support for them.⁶²⁰ By the time Edwards was dismissed from Northampton in 1750 Bellamy had already abandoned the practice, the first minister in Connecticut to have done so.⁶²¹

With his reputation growing, in 1754 Bellamy received an invitation from First Presbyterian Church in New York City, a prominent, high-profile position serving a well-to-do congregation. Bellamy was under pressure to accept the position but after preaching on an extended residence there he made the fateful decision to remain in his rural outpost in Bethlehem. Bellamy wrote to the consociation overseeing the appointment that he was content with being "a minister out in the woods," and that he did not fit the city because, "I am not polite enough for them."⁶²² Bellamy's congregation in Bethlehem in fact was very much a reflection of him, without much social standing and younger than the typical

⁶¹⁸ Edwards, "Memoir," in WJB 1: lxiv.

⁶¹⁹ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 18.

⁶²⁰ Edwards, "Memoir," in WJB 1: lvi.

⁶²¹ Ibid. Bellamy expressed his debt to Edwards regarding this issue by writing in a short tract depicting an imaginary dialogue between an unconverted parishioner and a New Divinity minister, with the minister giving this advice: "if you will read what the late learned, pious President Edwards wrote on the qualifications for christian communion, printed at Boston... you may in them see the truth confirmed, and objections answered more largely." See Bellamy, *The Half-way Covenant. A Dialogue* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1769), 15.

⁶²² Edwards, "Memoir," in WJB 1: xvii.

Old Light congregations in the region. This made them more open to the Awakening and amenable to the radical changes of rejecting the Half-Way Covenant, the main issue of contention that led to Edwards's dismissal from Northampton.⁶²³

In a memorandum regarding the decision to remain in Bethlehem, Bellamy wrote an imaginary dialogue where he presented the struggle as a kind of spiritual battle, with several invested parties voicing their opinions. He imagined the voices of those in New York saying: "Aha! Aha! He cares not for his people, nor is moved by their tears...He has torn away! Dollars! Dollars! Dollars!!!"⁶²⁴ Showing a keen awareness of his reputation as a famed preacher Bellamy has an enemy of his saying: "He intimates that Mr. Edwards 'is not so florid a preacher' as himself; but adds, that 'he is, by many good judges, esteemed, on the whole, the best preacher in America.'"⁶²⁵ His reputation as a powerful speaker was noted in another anecdotal story where after a successful preaching tour he agonized over whether the frenzied audience response was a genuine work of the spirit or just evidence of his abilities as a speaker. Concluding that the audience would have reacted no differently with or without the spirit's work, Bellamy decided that he would no longer involve himself in itinerant revival preaching.⁶²⁶

⁶²³ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 16.

⁶²⁴ Edwards, "Memoir," in WJB 1: xxiii. At the time the proposed ministerial salary would have been the highest in the country. See Glenn Paul Anderson, "Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790): The Man and His Work" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1971), 470.

⁶²⁵ Edwards, "Memoir," in WJB 1: xxiii. Whether this memorandum was meant for public consumption is not known. Bellamy shows a remarkable frankness and self-consciousness about how he was viewed in the public eye. A large part of rejecting the New York position was to silence his critics that he was after fame and self-promotion.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, lxii-lxiii.

The Millennium

Given his strengths as a gifted preacher, had Bellamy taken the position in New York he could have been a prominent pulpit prince of his generation. But while he was content to remain a country preacher in Bethlehem, Bellamy's influence would move far beyond the confines of rural Connecticut. Having established his reputation as a theologian with *True Religion Delineated*, Bellamy sought to amplify Edwards's apocalyptic voice with *The Millennium*. Bellamy's millennial sermon was published in 1758, the year of Edwards's death, perhaps a fitting tribute and symbolic gesture from a disciple who seemed to have understood the deeply-held apocalyptic dispositions of his mentor. The sermon, however, was only one of a three-part trilogy written by Bellamy that was occasioned by events of the previous several years. Between 1755 and 1758 British forces suffered humiliating defeats during the early phases of the French and Indian War, or Seven Years' War (1756-1763). In 1755, three hundred volunteers from Connecticut lost their lives when Major General Edward Braddock's forces were ambushed in Pennsylvania.⁶²⁷ That same year brought an earthquake to New England and one of the most devastating tremors in history hit Lisbon, Portugal as well. In July 1758, British forces failed to take Fort Carillon in Ticonderoga. It was the most publicized defeat of the war and it brought upon a sense of doom for the American colonists.⁶²⁸ In addition, droughts and epidemics continued to threaten the lives and livelihood of New Englanders.

⁶²⁷ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 111.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

In 1758, within the backdrop of ominous prospects of the war and various natural disasters, Bellamy tried to remind the colonists of God's grand plan of redemption. Devoid of historical context Bellamy's millennial sermon can be seen as a succinct summary of Edwards's *A History of the Work of Redemption*, focusing on the essential biblical grounds of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought. The sermon itemized the history of redemption through a biblical and eschatological lens just as Edwards had done. As evidenced by the numerous citations from Edwards's favorite commentator, Moses Lowman, Bellamy read widely from the same sources on Revelation. While it is unknown whether Bellamy had access to Edwards's notes on apocalyptic subjects he was at least familiar with the Redemption Discourse sermons on which *HWR* was based.⁶²⁹ While studying under Edwards he was presumably exposed to much of Edwards's teachings and we can surmise the teacher and student must have had in-depth discussions on the end times.⁶³⁰ Bellamy was certainly aware of the highly publicized criticisms of Edwards's interpretation on millennial themes in the *Humble Attempt* and seems to have been careful to avoid an American-centric view of the millennium and in the calculation of times and dates.

The very beginning of the sermon was a call to arms, relating the story of the great battle between God, as the "moral Governor of the world" against the powers and

⁶²⁹ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 31-32.

⁶³⁰ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 14-15. See also Park, "Memoir," 50. Park suggests Edwards, Bellamy, and Hopkins "had all things in common" as they shared books and critiqued each other's manuscripts.

principalities controlled by Satan.⁶³¹ Just as the Jews in the Babylonian Captivity wept when remembering Zion, the church of Christ must endure the reign of the “mystical Babylon” by awaiting their deliverance, foretold “by the spirit of prophecy.”⁶³² Starting from the seed of the woman who would bruise Satan’s head, biblical prophecy was God’s providential signals to his people that no matter the situation victory was awaiting at the end. Thus true disciples must have the same spirit as the “General” Jesus Christ, who having sacrificed his life, set an example for those in his service to follow.⁶³³ Not as fanciful in typological language as Cotton Mather or Edwards, Bellamy nevertheless went through a brief historical survey of the Old Testament prophecies in typical Puritan fashion. He saw Egyptian bondage as a type of the fallen world with Pharaoh representing the tyrannical rule of Satan and like most Puritan divines he interpreted Israel’s kings, David and Solomon, to be types of Christ.⁶³⁴

“But when shall the son of David reign, and the church have rest?” Bellamy asked rhetorically. Like Edwards and other Puritan expositors before him Bellamy believed that the institution of Mosaic holy days was a foreshadowing of the millennial timeline. He wrote in language similar to Edwards, “so, perhaps, after *six thousand* years are spent in labour and sorrow by the church of God, the *seven thousandth* shall be a season of

⁶³¹ Joseph Bellamy, *The Millennium*, in *The Works of the Reverend Joseph Bellamy*, vol. 1 (New York: Stephen Dodge, 1811), 495. The *Works* of the Reverend Joseph Bellamy heretofore referred as WRJB, followed by volume and page number.

⁶³² Bellamy, *The Millennium*, in WRJB 1:496-497.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 497-498.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 499-500.

spiritual rest and joy, an holy sabbath to the Lord.”⁶³⁵ The millennium would be a time when the gospel will be preached “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”⁶³⁶ Bellamy referenced Moses Lowman in stating that during the imprisonment of Satan, almost all will be converted and if any remain unconverted the number will be so small as to have no impact on Christ’s reign.⁶³⁷ “For the Scripture no where teaches, that the greatest part of the whole human race will finally perish,” Bellamy proclaimed.⁶³⁸ As empirical support Bellamy calculated that up to the current time, even if one in ten thousand had not been converted, the millennium would afford the opportunity for the majority of mankind to be saved.⁶³⁹

Bellamy exhibited the same tendency as Edwards of trying to strike the right balance between difficult prophetic warnings of future tribulation and the hopeful promises of millennial glory. He concluded the sermon with an optimistic vision of a plentiful harvest of souls. From the assumption that the thousand year reign of Christ will be a time when “the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea,” Bellamy asserted that “there will be more saved in these thousand years, than ever before dwelt upon the face of the earth from the foundation of the world.”⁶⁴⁰ Bellamy provided detailed information of his calculations:

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 500.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 502.

⁶³⁷ Ibid. See footnote.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 510.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 511.

If it be granted that it is difficult to compute with any exactness in such a case as this, yet it is easy to make such a computation as may satisfy us in the point before us. For in Egypt the Hebrews doubled at the rate of about once in fourteen years; in New England the inhabitants double in less than twenty-five years; it will be moderate, therefore, to suppose mankind, in the millennium, when all the earth is full of peace and prosperity, will double every fifty years. But at this rate, there will be time enough in a thousand years to double twenty times, which would produce such a multitude of people, as that although we should suppose all, who live before the millennium begins, to be lost, yet if all these should be saved, there would be above seventeen thousand saved, to one that would be lost; as may appear from the table below.⁶⁴¹

Bellamy's table showed an elementary calculation of a population doubling every twenty years with the final number being 2,097,150. Supposing a world history of 120 periods of 50-year generations, Bellamy concluded his data analysis with a curious ratio of seventeen-thousand saved to one lost.⁶⁴² Edwards had discussed the exponential number of conversions in the millennium but Bellamy took it a step further in presenting the information in graph form. It was a way to convey to a growing Enlightenment audience that God's prophecies did not necessarily need to come through supernatural miracles; God's providence could just as easily come to pass through human measures.⁶⁴³

For Bellamy there were some interpretations of the millennium that merited speculation and some that did not. Like Edwards, Bellamy believed that Christ's reign in the millennium was not physical, but spiritual. He wrote:

Whatever mistakes Christian divines may fall into, in their interpretation of 666, the number of the beast, or in their endeavours to fix the precise

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 511-512.

⁶⁴² Ibid., 512.

⁶⁴³ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 31.

time when the 1260 years of Antichrist's reign shall begin and end; or whatever wrong notions some have had, or may have about the nature of the Millennium, as though Christ was to reign personally on earth; and if some, meanwhile, begin to think, that all things will go on as they have done, and to conclude, that the expectation of these glorious days, which has prevailed in the christian church from the beginning, is merely a groundless fancy; yet none of these things will at all alter the case.⁶⁴⁴

Like his mentor Bellamy adopted a spiritualist interpretation of the millennial reign of Christ, a view that came to be associated with postmillennialism. But he was also of the persuasion that the worst was still to come, a view associated more with premillennialism. In the 1750s, however, most commenters of Revelation moved freely between various interpretations. There was not the ossification of beliefs about the millennium that formed in the nineteenth century.⁶⁴⁵

What the apocalyptic literature of this time showed was a growing consensus that things would indeed grow worse before it got better.⁶⁴⁶ The generation of Bellamy, Hopkins, Aaron Burr Sr., and others believed in a future time of abomination for the church. They departed from Edwards on this point. But aside from the belief Edwards held that the slaying of the two witnesses and the worst persecutions of the church were events of the past, there was not much of a difference in language, tone, or eschatological outlook between Edwards's afflictive model of suffering and future glory for the church and Bellamy's warnings of trials and tribulations to come. Ruth Bloch acknowledges that "the difference between the millennialism of the 1750s and that of the Awakening was

⁶⁴⁴ *The Millennium*, in WRJB 1:508-509.

⁶⁴⁵ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 32.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

subtle, for even Edwards had balanced his optimism with the belief that progress would be uneven.”⁶⁴⁷ For Bloch the difference was more a matter of degree than a departure of apocalyptic worldviews. She writes: “There is no doubt that the difference between Edwards and Burr over the slaying of the witnesses was that between a relatively more progressive and a relatively more cataclysmic view.”⁶⁴⁸

Like Edwards, Bellamy looked to Moses Lowman for inspiration regarding the most speculative parts of his millennial thought. For example, on the slain martyrs who come back to life to reign with Christ in Revelation 20:4, Bellamy expressed a similar opinion following Lowman that it was not meant to be literal, but that just as John the Baptist was described as coming in the spirit of Elijah, Christians would reign in the spirit of the martyrs as though they had been raised from the dead.⁶⁴⁹ Edwards’s view was somewhat more nuanced as he believed the martyred saints would undergo some form of “resurrection” to reign in heaven with Christ.⁶⁵⁰ Bellamy asked in regards to the timing of the millennium: “But when shall these things be?” He speculated that the height of the secular pope was 756 CE and that the fall of the Antichrist might be as gradual as was his rise. However, his premise was that all the trials and tribulations in scripture were preparatory—“an introduction to the glorious event God had then in his eye.”⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 240n25.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ *The Millennium*, in WRJB 1:502. See footnote.

⁶⁵⁰ Edwards, “Blank Bible,” note on Revelation, in WJE 24:1241; *Notes on the Apocalypse*, in WJE 5:144-145.

⁶⁵¹ *The Millennium*, in WRJB 1:506-507.

As the finale of a three-part series of sermons designed to address the deficiencies of Arminian and antinomian theological schemas, Bellamy directed attention to the ongoing spiritual battle between the General, that is, Jesus Christ, and Satan. This dialectical division was made abundantly clear, with “Christ” appearing 10 times and “Satan” appearing 22 times in the text. Mark Valeri sees retributive justice as the main doctrine underlying the sermon, writing: “This last act in the divine drama, written in the eschatological passages of the Bible, fell into two parts: the final punishment of evil and the ultimate salvation of a remarkable number of elect.”⁶⁵² Bellamy relied heavily on militant language befitting Revelation, but his audience would have clearly recognized the backdrop of the concurrent war. As if addressing both fronts Bellamy beckoned his readers to “enlist as volunteers under your prince, Messiah...O, love not your lives to the death! And die courageously, firmly believing the cause of truth and righteousness will finally prevail.”⁶⁵³

The 1750s saw a steady stream of works on the millennium, especially from New Light authors.⁶⁵⁴ Ruth Bloch identifies two main types from the period—ones that exploited the latest news, such as the results of the battles from the French and Indian War or the great earthquake of Lisbon (1755); the other more academic and theological—expositions on the millennium that tended to adhere closer to biblical texts of prophecy.⁶⁵⁵ Bellamy’s millennium sermon was a prime example of the latter. In the

⁶⁵² Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy’s New England*, 125.

⁶⁵³ *The Millennium*, in WRJB 1:515.

⁶⁵⁴ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 29.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

1750s Bellamy was occupied with preserving the orthodox Calvinism of Congregationalism. But the events of the day tended to steer theological discussions toward sensationalistic interpretations of what God was doing. Bellamy's millennium sermon served as a measured theological response by giving an overview of God's providence through a proper eschatological lens of a cosmic spiritual battle between a holy God and Satan, the lawless rebel. The other two-thirds of the sermon trilogy, *The Divinity of Jesus Christ* and *The Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin* were focused on the explication of a supra-historical theology of divine providence—the governmental atonement based upon God as the moral law-giver and author of retributive justice and Christ as the perfect demonstration of divine benevolence.⁶⁵⁶ These sermons prepared the way for Edwards's apocalyptic thought to be reconstituted and incorporated into an emerging theological school that would be called New Divinity.

Samuel Hopkins

A prominent pastor theologian whose career spanned both the First and Second Great Awakening as an active participant, Samuel Hopkins's long life of ministry was unique, perhaps as rare as someone who served in the Civil War and lived through World War I. Hopkins was in many ways quite different from Joseph Bellamy in both personality and ministry.⁶⁵⁷ He was born in Waterbury, CT on September 17, 1721, the

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 119-124. See Joseph Bellamy, *Sermons Upon the Following Subjects, viz. The Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Millenium [sic]. The Wisdom of God, in the Permission of Sin* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1758).

⁶⁵⁷ Significant works by Hopkins include his systematic theology, *A System of Doctrines*, two discourses on the emancipation of slavery, as well as the first biography of Jonathan Edwards.

first child of respectable parents whose ancestors were counted among the first settlers of New England.⁶⁵⁸ In his autobiography Hopkins described himself a well-behaved, industrious youth but somewhat full of vanity and not often serious about the things of God. Growing up on a farm he was content with working with his hands but his father had plans for him to attend college for a life of learning. Hopkins entered Yale in 1737 at the age of sixteen. Although not much is known about Bellamy's childhood and the circumstances surrounding his conversion, it seems that once he experienced that "thorough law-work" in his life he never looked back. This was not the case for Hopkins. In his late teens he made a "profession of religion" and gained membership in his parents' church in Waterbury. But a conversation with a few Arminians he knew made him wonder whether he had gone through the proper Calvinistic morphology of conversion.⁶⁵⁹

While Hopkins was agonizing over the question of conversion, George Whitefield came to New Haven in October 1740, which made Hopkins pay attention to the revival going on around him. Though he felt some stirrings he could not quite claim an awakening for himself. The next year Gilbert Tennant (1703-1764) came to preach in New Haven. The college was riled up by revival preaching and future New Light leaders Samuel Buell and David Brainerd even went door to door to convert their classmates. Hopkins confessed that at Brainerd's challenge he realized he had never had a heart-felt

⁶⁵⁸ Park, "Memoir," in WSH 1:11. Biographical information will be primarily from this work.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

conversion experience but was too proud to admit it.⁶⁶⁰ Hopkins remained in a state of confusion until one day he had a new awareness of God—Jesus Christ and the way of salvation became all the more real to him. He was in effect experiencing the strong religious affections that Edwards had written about regarding the genuine work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. This transformative experience was similar to Edwards's own conversion story. But Hopkins admitted that at the time he did not realize what had happened to him and told no one about it. This renewed sense of God, however, prompted Hopkins to pursue further theological training under Gilbert Tennant, a figure who in Hopkins's estimation was the greatest preacher he had ever heard. That is, until he heard the *Distinguishing Marks* commencement sermon that Edwards preached at Yale in 1741, whereupon Hopkins made a vow to study with his newfound mentor.⁶⁶¹

After graduation Hopkins went to Waterbury, CT where his doubts about his salvation continued to torment him to the point he had to make a trek to the Edwards residence in Northampton. Although Edwards was away on a preaching tour Sarah Edwards took him in and ministered to Hopkins's struggling soul. His former classmate, Samuel Buell, happened to be in Northampton at the time filling in for Edwards while he was away. Hopkins joined Buell on a preaching tour where he experienced many coming to salvation. He was finally able to gather enough courage to share his spiritual struggles with Edwards and upon hearing about the religious affections Hopkins felt before, the

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 16. Although Brainerd was only a sophomore and Hopkins a senior, the former was three years older.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 18.

mentor assured his student he had been saved.⁶⁶² From that time on Hopkins became an “Edwardsean” in that his entire life would be forever entwined with his teacher. Having spent nearly eight months in Northampton Hopkins became familiar with Edwards’s character and was the ideal person to be his mentor’s first biographer.⁶⁶³

Like Edwards, Hopkins wrote copiously, starting a diary from which much information for the memoir and his own autobiography was gathered. At times he seemed to write in the diary as if it were a form of therapy. He was honest about his bouts of depression and was especially self-critical of his preaching and ministerial gifts. With a large physical body Hopkins cut an imposing figure on the pulpit and had a spiritually commanding presence. But unlike Bellamy, who seemed self-assured of his gifts, Hopkins was prone to questioning his competence. While the content of Hopkins’s preaching was held with high regard his delivery was wanting. If Bellamy was Whitefield’s equal as an orator, Hopkins was acknowledged to be a relatively poor speaker.⁶⁶⁴ Underlying the self-doubt, however, was a man of deep humility. Hopkins developed his spirituality with the help of Edwards, of whom he described thusly:

He was, so far as it can be known, much on his knees in secret, and in devout reading God’s word, and meditation upon it. And his constant, solemn converse with God, in these exercise of secret religion, made his face, as it were, to shine before others. His appearance, his countenance,

⁶⁶² Ibid., 20.

⁶⁶³ Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1765). Not to be outdone by Bellamy naming his second son, Jonathan, Hopkins named one of his daughters, Jerusha. While Jerusha might have been a common name (coincidentally David Brainerd’s sister’s name was also Jerusha), the fact that Hopkins also named another daughter, Hannah (another of Edwards’s daughters), makes it likely Hopkins was honoring his mentor’s family.

⁶⁶⁴ Park, “Memoir,” in WSH 1:25, 27-28.

words, and whole demeanor, (though without any thing of affected grimace and sour ast erity [*sic*]) was attended with a seriousness, gravity, and solemnity which was natural, genuine indication and expression of a deep, abiding sense of divine things in his mind, and of his living constantly in the fear of God.⁶⁶⁵

This was the model of spirituality Hopkins sought to imitate—a quiet religious intensity based on a righteous fear of God. After establishing a church in Great Barrington he cultivated a life of the spiritual disciplines, which included a weekly day of fasting and prayer. Where he fell short in preaching prowess he made up for being an astute spiritual adviser. It was said of him: “And his power of detecting the symptoms of religious decline, and of determining the true state of the heart, formed one of the distinguishing qualifications of his pastoral character.”⁶⁶⁶ In the astute power of spiritual discernment he was much like his spiritual mentor.⁶⁶⁷ Undoubtedly, Edwards’s passing in 1758 deeply affected Hopkins. Added to the sorrow was Hopkins’s feelings of guilt for having chaired the committee recommending Edwards to the Princeton post.⁶⁶⁸ Another way Hopkins unwittingly followed in the footsteps of Edwards was in losing his congregation. After serving the Congregational church in the western frontier town of Great Barrington, MA for twenty-five years, Hopkins and a council agreed to dissolve the congregation in 1769.⁶⁶⁹ The reason for this parting was even more complex than

⁶⁶⁵ Samuel Hopkins, *Life and Character of the Late Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Glasgow, UK: David Niven, 1785), 53.

⁶⁶⁶ John Ferguson, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Reverend Samuel Hopkins, D.D.* (Boston: Leonard W. Kimball, 1830), 136.

⁶⁶⁷ Park, “Memoir,” in WSH 1:37.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

Edwards's from Northampton. Hopkins suffered, in part, from aligning himself to Edwards's rejection of the Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardeanism. Furthermore, like Edwards, Hopkins had to contend with salary issues as the townspeople of Great Barrington could not raise enough funds for a living wage. And as was the case in Northampton, power politics played an outsized part, with influential factions in Great Barrington essentially pushing for Hopkins's removal.⁶⁷⁰

Hopkins's dismissal from Great Barrington had much the same effect as Edwards's from Northampton in that it produced conditions conducive to their most theologically productive years. Although there was drama between warring factions in the hiring process Hopkins was eventually appointed to take over the First Congregational Church in Newport, Rhode Island in 1770. Moving from the rural region of the Berkshires to the bustling town of Newport required a period of adjustment. At the time Newport was second only to Boston in terms of size and commercial activity in all of New England, albeit with an outsized influence of the slave trade.⁶⁷¹ In a somewhat ironic twist, it was the humble farmer Hopkins who came to minister in a cosmopolitan area, while the more charismatic Bellamy remained in rural Connecticut.

In the same year, George Whitefield made a return visit to New England where he preached again to large audiences. But after some thirty years since his last tour during the height of the Great Awakening, the scene at Newport in 1770 was symbolic of the sea change in the religious landscape of colonial America. As was customary, Whitefield

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 68-70.

⁶⁷¹ Ferguson, *Life and Character of Reverend Samuel Hopkins*, 78.

preached at the First Congregational Church of Hopkins and at the more moderate Second Congregational Church of future Yale president Ezra Stiles (1727-1795). But Whitefield preached to a different audience than before. Reportedly, among the hearers in the congregation was even a young Jewess who apparently admired Whitefield's preaching.⁶⁷² Whitefield also received a Baptist audience and preached before a relatively diverse outdoor crowd of thousands.⁶⁷³ Newport's diversity reflected its bustling port town profile but everywhere in colonial America there were signs of rapid cultural, social, and even demographic change. Through all the turbulence of the period, however, Hopkins was able to make a mark as he displayed a spiritual consistency that made admirers even of his opponents. Hopkins remained at his post in Newport until his death in 1803.

A Treatise on the Millennium

Samuel Hopkins may be considered the first systematic theologian of an independent America. Samuel Willard's (1640-1707) *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, published in 1726 was the only work of systematic theology before Hopkins's *System of Doctrines* in 1793.⁶⁷⁴ Unlike Bellamy, whose major millennial work came mid-career,

⁶⁷² Park, "Memoir," in WSH 1:86. By this time there was a sizable Jewish population in Newport, with even the presence of the Touro synagogue built in 1763. See Michael Hoberman, *New Israel/New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 122.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 65. Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (Boston: B. Green and S. Kneeland, 1726). Samuel Hopkins, *The System of Doctrines Contained in Divine Revelation, Explained and Defended* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793).

Hopkins published his most important eschatological treatise in 1793 toward the end of his long life as a minister and theologian. *A Treatise on the Millennium* was first published as an attachment to his Reformed systematic theology. Earlier in his life Hopkins was engaged in defending the theological tenets of an emerging New Divinity. In the later stage of his life Hopkins turned his energies to social reform movements. This was in part due to his eschatology. Hopkins saw in pressing social issues the concrete manifestations of millennial significance. Concurrent with his change in focus were external factors. Like Edwards, Hopkins personally experienced a concentrated period of great sorrow. Between 1786 and 1793 he lost three daughters, a son, and a wife.⁶⁷⁵ In the midst of grief Hopkins not only found solace in the millennium, his effectiveness in ministry seems to have been purified and sustained by his hope of future glory. The liberal theologian William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), who as a child heard Hopkins in the Newport congregation, wrote with damning praise that Hopkins “took refuge from the present state of things in the Millennium. The Millennium was his chosen ground. If any subject of thought possessed him above all others, I suppose it to have been this. The Millennium was more than a belief to him. It had the freshness of visible things. He was at home in it.”⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁵ Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1981), 159-160.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 173. See William Ellery Channing, *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1845), 353.

The treatise was a culmination of Hopkins's lifelong studies on the millennium, which earlier he had put aside so that he could focus on his theological system. Somewhat cloyingly he dedicated the treatise "to the people who shall live in the days of the millennium," a poignant love letter to an unknown future generation like a grandfather writing to distant descendants he would never meet.⁶⁷⁷ It was also a way to frame the speculative nature of millennial thought as he apologized in advance to those who would be able to evaluate, at the precipice of the millennium, the correctness of such things.⁶⁷⁸ Proving too clever for some, Jonathan Edwards Jr. (1745-1801), in providing critical commentary on the *System* and *Treatise*, disapproved of the setup, writing: "I wish the Dedication to the Millenarians were left out; it is too fanciful."⁶⁷⁹ More than being fanciful, Hopkins's intention was to press upon the teachings of Edwards, Bellamy, and other commentators on the millennium to future generations. As he wrote at the end of his Introduction:

The following treatise on the Millennium, is not designed so much to advance any new sentiments concerning it, which have never before been offered to the public, as to revive and repeat those which have been already suggested by some authors, which are thought to be very important, and ought to be understood, and kept constantly in the view of all, in order to their having a proper conception of the church of Christ in this world, and reading the scriptures to their best advantage, and greatest comfort: Though perhaps something will be advanced, respecting the events which, according to scripture, are to take place between the present

⁶⁷⁷ Samuel Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 2 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865), 224.

⁶⁷⁸ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, in WSH 2:224.

⁶⁷⁹ Park, "Memoir," in WSH 1:207.

time, and the introduction of the happy state of the church, which have not been before so particularly considered.⁶⁸⁰

Hopkins began the treatise with the requisite brief overview of millennial thought, alleging that in the first three centuries after the apostles the doctrine of the millennium “was believed and taught,” but because of the excesses and absurdities of some extreme beliefs it lingered in obscurity until the Reformation. Even then so much unscriptural additions brought forth by radical groups made the orthodox Reformers abandon the teaching. The eighteenth century brought about a more careful consideration of the millennium “in a more rational, scriptural, and important light than before.”⁶⁸¹ After mentioning Daniel Whitby and Moses Lowman as two commentators of Revelation who represented this shift, Hopkins also recognized that “the late President Edwards attended much to this subject, and wrote upon it more than any other divine in this century,” specifically referencing Edwards’s *Humble Attempt* and *A History of the Work of Redemption*.⁶⁸² He added, “there is also extant a sermon on the Millennium, by the late Dr. Bellamy; and other writers have occasionally mentioned it; and this subject appears to be brought more particularly into view in the public prayers and preaching, and in conversation, in this age, than in former times, and the doctrine of the Millennium is more generally believed and better understood.”⁶⁸³ Hopkins saw the signs of heightened

⁶⁸⁰ *A Treatise on the Millennium*, in WSH 2:228.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 227. Hopkins’s cursory mention of Bellamy’s work is somewhat surprising. Joseph Conforti notes that Hopkins built from Bellamy’s sermon on the millennium, see, Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 162-163. In my own assessment, the first half of the work seems to contain

awareness of the last things a welcome development, stating: “this is rather an encouragement to attempt further to explain and illustrate this important, pleasing, useful subject, in which every Christian is so much interested,” and that the subject “is far from being exhausted.”⁶⁸⁴ With characteristic prudence Hopkins acknowledged that since there are so many different interpretations of the same prophecies, they “all cannot be right.”⁶⁸⁵ He continued, “But every opinion respecting future events, which is [a] matter of conjecture only, however probable it may be in the view of him who proposes it, ought to be entertained with modesty and diffidence.”⁶⁸⁶

In the treatise Hopkins displayed his affinity for systematic analysis with an organized summary of apocalyptic passages from scripture. As he noted in his introduction, the work was “not designed so much to advance any new sentiments,” but rather “to revive and repeat” those thoughts that Hopkins felt were important, worthy of further contemplation, and to be “kept constantly in view.”⁶⁸⁷ Like Edwards and Bellamy, Hopkins articulated a mostly postmillennial vision of the future. Hopkins argued against the notion that the return of Christ should be taken literally, that is, Jesus’ reign on earth would not be a physical, but a figurative and spiritual dominion. Consequently, he followed Bellamy in believing that the martyrs who were raised up to reign with Christ

many of the elements in Bellamy’s sermon, while the second half reflects more an ongoing dialogue with the millennial writings of Lowman and Edwards.

⁶⁸⁴ *A Treatise on the Millennium*, in WSH 2:227.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

will not undergo a bodily resurrection, but that their souls will be restored, writing: “the souls of the martyrs and all the faithful followers of Christ who have lived in the world, and have died before the millennium shall commence, shall revive again in their successors, who shall rise up in the same spirit and in the same character in which they lived and died.”⁶⁸⁸ He meant simply that it will be a spiritual resurrection, although Hopkins did not provide the mechanism by which these souls would reign.

Hopkins conceived of all the nations being converted in the millennium. After the first resurrection, which is spiritual, would come the second resurrection, which will be bodily.⁶⁸⁹ Hopkins described the millennium as a period where the work of redemption and salvation would be fully realized. He referred to Bellamy’s sermon on the millennium that showed the ratio of saved to unsaved throughout history would comfortably favor the saved.⁶⁹⁰ In a passage regarding the Jews, Hopkins anticipated the day when the Jews and Gentiles would be united as one under Jesus Christ, and after the millennium, “shall be transplanted from earth to heaven, where the spiritual David will reign over it forever.”⁶⁹¹ Hopkins also confirmed the one area where all good Protestant expositors of the ends times agreed, that is, the role of the Antichrist being equated with the Catholic Church. Hopkins wrote regarding the beast: “The little horn which was on the beast, and destroyed with the beast, whose body was given to the burning flame, is

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 267.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 269.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 255.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 246.

the pope of Rome, with the kingdom and power, civil and ecclesiastical, of which he is the head,” and added to the sentiment was a footnote: “this is abundantly proved in Newton’s Dissertation on the Prophecies.”⁶⁹² Only when the beast with the horn is destroyed will the kingdom of Christ come as predicted. Even with the caveats offered about not being dogmatic about end-times speculations, for orthodox Calvinists like Hopkins there was little compromise when it came to the millennial identification of the Roman Catholic Church.

Hopkins devoted a lengthy portion of the treatise to a detailed description of the nature of the millennium. It was mostly a standard, biblically-inspired analysis of future peace and prosperity similar to Edwards’s and Bellamy’s descriptions. In its utopian ideals Hopkins anticipated the rapid development of agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, and technology. He wrote there will be no sects or denominations, there will instead be one Lord, one baptism, and one united people of God. With the proliferation of the population the innumerable numbers will understand one another through one language.⁶⁹³ As an educator Hopkins envisioned a future where students did not need to spend countless hours, energy, and money in learning all the different languages of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.⁶⁹⁴ Thus all believers will finally be united in one universal catholic church, without sects and denominations, worshiping and praising God in one spiritual

⁶⁹² Ibid., 242.

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 289.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 290.

language.⁶⁹⁵ Hopkins argued that although the church universal will be in this holy and happy state there would still be a need for wise civilian rulers to tend to temporal matters while the church attends to the spiritual.⁶⁹⁶

As for the timing, Hopkins followed the precursors of postmillennialism, Moses Lowman and Daniel Whitby, in anticipating a gradual process of prosperity of the church by stages and degrees. Hopkins agreed with most Protestant divines, including Edwards and Bellamy, who believed the millennium will come after 6,000 years of human civilization, the seventh millennia equated with the seventh day of rest following the six days of creation. Keeping with the theme of sevens, Hopkins emphasized the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated on the seventh month, as a type of the millennium.⁶⁹⁷ Invoking Zechariah 14:16 where all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go year to year to worship the king and observe the Feast of Tabernacles, Hopkins wrote: “By the feast of the tabernacles are meant the enjoyments and blessings of the millennium, of which all nations shall then partake, and which were typified by that feast.”⁶⁹⁸ The date of the millennium was possible, according to Hopkins, if one could ascertain the precise time the pope became the beast. Hopkins concurred with Lowman and Edwards that it was probably during the reign of Pepin in 756 that marked the designation of the pope’s

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 292.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 293. See footnote.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 295, 299.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 299.

ascendancy to the height of power and authority.⁶⁹⁹ From the prophecy of 1,260 days in the book of Daniel (and in Revelation 11 and 12) being added as years to 756, Hopkins lent support to Edwards's calculation that the year 2016 would be near the beginning of the seventh millennia of the world.⁷⁰⁰

In terms of the seven vials, Hopkins mostly followed the lead of Lowman and Edwards. Hopkins accepted Lowman's interpretation that the first five vials had already been poured out, with Luther and the Reformation marking the fifth vial. The pouring out of the sixth and seventh vials would lead to the battle of Armageddon and the binding of Satan and his minions for a thousand years. Toward the end of the millennial age there would be one final battle between Christ and Satan and Satan would be defeated once and for all. During this time many Christians would suffer, but the half-hearted, or false believers will be purged and the true Christians refined and purified.⁷⁰¹ At the same time the Jews will be few in number but those who make it through the millennial age would lose their rituals and distinctions, such as the sign of circumcision and become true Christians.⁷⁰² David was a type of Christ in that through his conquests he had paved the way for the peace and prosperity of Israel. Solomon was another type of Christ as he

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 300. See Edwards, "No. 94. Extracts from Mr. Lowman," in WJE 5:232.

⁷⁰⁰ *A Treatise on the Millennium*, in WSH 2:301.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 329.

⁷⁰² Ibid., 330.

ruled Israel at the peak of its glory; likewise Christ's reign during the millennium would represent his peak glory.⁷⁰³

Hopkins ended the work with a warning of God's judgment and wrath, reminding believers to remain watchful, alert, and to discern the times.⁷⁰⁴ Hopkins rejected Edwards's concern that Christians might be discouraged from praying for the millennium if they feared dark times ahead for the church. Instead, Hopkins argued that the truth is always more preferable so that Christians might be rightly prepared.⁷⁰⁵

It will probably be suggested, that the representation of such a dark scene, and evil time, to take place before the millennium will come, is a matter of great discouragement, and tends to damp the spirits and hopes of Christians, and to discourage them from attempting to promote it, or praying for it, especially as it is set so far off from our day, so that one in this or the next generation are like to see it.⁷⁰⁶

Believing his calculations would put the millennium sometime within two hundred years, Hopkins encouraged the believers that although neither they nor their immediate descendants would live to see the coming of the millennium they could "promote its coming" by prayer and through the conversion of sinners.⁷⁰⁷ Hopkins wrote that the most happy and glorious day of the coming of the millennium will have its "full effect on

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 331.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 357.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 358.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 357-58.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., 359.

earth, in the salvation of men, to which all the preceding times and events are preparatory.”⁷⁰⁸

Hopkins’s detailed presentation of a millennial ideal reads much like an architect or a designer’s rendition of a model or blueprint that has been turned, examined, and measured every which way—conceptual, technical, and descriptive. Perhaps William Ellery Channing was apt in describing Hopkins’s millennial imagination:

His book on the subject has an air of reality, as if written from observation. He describes the habits and customs of the Millennium, as one familiar with them. He enjoyed this future glory of the church not a whit the less, because it was so much his own creation. The fundamental idea, the germ, he found in the Scriptures, but it expanded in and from his own mind. Whilst to the multitude he seemed a hard, dry theologian, feeding on the thorns of controversy, he was living in a region of imagination, feeding on visions of a holiness and a happiness, which are to make earth all but heaven.⁷⁰⁹

Joseph Conforti makes the argument that the *Treatise on the Millennium* takes Edwards’s millennialism “in the direction of social utopianism.”⁷¹⁰ But as mentioned in his introduction Hopkins did not intend to blaze new trails. His description of the millennial kingdom rarely departed from biblical references and thus any discrepancies from Edwards’s conception of the millennium and Hopkins’s is more a matter of degree than substance. While there is a connection between Hopkins’s notion of “disinterested benevolence” and his millennial outlook, it is unclear whether his social reform agenda informed his millennial utopianism, or vice versa. More likely Hopkins’s perceived social

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 361.

⁷⁰⁹ Channing, *Works of William E. Channing*, 353.

⁷¹⁰ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 161.

utopianism was more a product of the historical situation as the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century was a period rife with religious and social experimentation that included many different iterations of religious and social utopianism. In the following sections we will explore the themes of the interconnectedness of Hopkins's disinterested benevolence, his millennial social utopianism, and late nineteenth-century social reform.

New Nation, New World, New Divinity, 1758-1793

Between Bellamy's sermon on the millennium in 1758 and Hopkins's millennial treatise in 1793, this formative period of the nation was significantly impacted by the convergence of historical events in America and Europe and the emergence of New Divinity thought in the Congregational and Presbyterian churches of New England. Although not as overtly apocalyptically-oriented as Edwards, both Bellamy and Hopkins aligned New Divinity thought with the Edwardsean New Light emphases on the revivalistic conversion/redemption narrative, an affective personal piety, a global missional spirit, and an afflictive model of spiritual warfare culminating in Christ's ultimate victory. This Edwardsean tradition would come to be known as the New England Theology in the nineteenth century.⁷¹¹

The worldview these first-generation Edwardseans developed allowed for a measure of meaningful theological consistency during the upheavals of social and

⁷¹¹ Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 15n5.

cultural change.⁷¹² Like Edwards, Bellamy and Hopkins had high hopes for America's preparatory role in the millennium. But while Edwards's apocalyptic views were formulated while he was still a British colonist, Bellamy, Hopkins, and other New Divinity leaders faced the unbounded horizons of a new nation and their place as citizens in what seemed like a whole new reality in a whole new world. New Divinity became what may be considered America's first sustained school of theology, the fount of a broader New England Theology.⁷¹³ Subsequently, I make the argument that Edwardsean New Divinity thought was the major theological bridge between the First and Second Great Awakenings.

New Nation: The Revolution and the Revelation

The question of what role New Divinity thought, especially its apocalyptic elements, played during the crucial years of the American Revolution is still open to debate.⁷¹⁴ James Davidson's analysis of the general millennial rhetoric from before the Revolution in 1763 and afterward in 1783 shows no discernible difference.⁷¹⁵ Does this

⁷¹² Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 147.

⁷¹³ Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers*, 43. Kuklick refers to New Divinity as the first phase of the New England Theology, which "represents the most sustained intellectual tradition in the United States."

⁷¹⁴ Philip Goff, "Revivals and Revolution: Historiographic Turns since Alan Heimert's 'Religion and the American Mind,'" *Church History* 67, no. 4 (December 1998): 695-721. Goff's historiographic essay of Heimert's thesis linking Calvinists, religion, and revolution traces the argument through a socio-cultural lens. Goff identifies three general camps: 1) critics of Heimert, which include heavyweights Edward Morgan, Sidney Mead, and Bernard Bailyn as well as Gordon Wood, Nathan Hatch, and Jon Butler; 2) sympathizers, which include William G. McLoughlin, Patricia Bonomi, Donald Weber, Ruth Bloch, and John Pahl; and 3) synthesizers, which include Mark A. Noll, Harry S. Stout, and Gerald McDermott.

⁷¹⁵ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 213.

verify Bernard Bailyn's conclusion that religion had "no singular influence on the Revolutionary movement"?⁷¹⁶ The lack of evidence leads Davidson to conclude in part that political decisions were not as influenced by millennial thinking as might be expected given the potential explosiveness of end-time narratives.⁷¹⁷ For the most part Revelation did not lead to Revolution. But correlation does not have to mean causation. Explosive apocalyptic language of equating French Catholicism with the Antichrist during the French and Indian War could be seen as a dry run for the revolutionary rhetoric of the patriots.⁷¹⁸ For instance, it would not take a leap of imagination for someone to equate the mark of the beast with the Stamp Act of 1765.⁷¹⁹ As Ruth Bloch writes: "This early patriot identification of the British ministry with the symbol of the Antichrist marked the first step towards an eschatological understanding of the revolutionary conflict."⁷²⁰ This was heightened after the Quebec Act of 1774 that granted a place for the French within British territory. Satanic conspiracy theories abounded as to Popish influence even within the British government.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁶ Bernard Bailyn, "Religion and Revolution: Three Biographical Studies," *Perspectives in American History* 4 (1970): 83-169. Quoted in Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 215.

⁷¹⁷ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 258.

⁷¹⁸ Nathan Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (Hew Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 43. Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 57.

⁷¹⁹ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 54-55.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

By and large New England clergy were proponents of independence and it cut across factions, denominations, and generations. Pulpits all across the colonies railed against the tyranny of British rule. On January 17, 1776, Samuel Sherwood (1730-1783), Yale graduate and nephew of Aaron Burr Sr., preached before his Congregationalist parishioners in Norfield, Connecticut a sermon on Revelation 12 titled, *The Church's Flight into the Wilderness*, equating the woman's flight into the wilderness to the current political situation.⁷²² This sermon serves as perhaps the clearest example of Revolution as fulfillment of Revelation amongst the extant canon of revolutionary preaching. Sherwood expounded on the relation:

THESE United Colonies have arisen to such a height as to become the object of public attention thro' all Europe, and of envy to the mother from whence they derived; whose unprovoked attack upon them in such a furious hostile manner, threatening their entire ruin, is an event that will make such a black and dark period in history, and does so deeply affect, not only the liberty of the church here in the wilderness, but the protestant cause in general, thro' the christian world, and is big with such consequences of glory or terror, that we may conjecture at least, without a spirit of vanity and enthusiasm, that some of those prophecies of St. John may, not unaptly, be applied to our case, and receive their fulfilment in such providences as are passing over us.⁷²³

Sherwood agreed with past "judicious commentators" on the Apocalypse (Edwards being one of them) that saw the identity of the dragon as Popery, of which the tracking of "its

⁷²² Stephen J. Stein, "An Apocalyptic Rationale for the American Revolution," *Early American Literature* 9, no. 3 (Winter 1975): 211. The woman's flight into the wilderness is from Revelation 12:6: "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (AV).

⁷²³ Samuel Sherwood, *The Church's Flight into the Wilderness: An Address on the Times: Containing Some Very Interesting and Important Observations on Scripture Prophecies: Shewing, that Sundry of Them Plainly Relate to Great-Britain, and the American Colonies; and are Fulfilling in the Present Day* (New York: S. Loudon, 1776), 18.

rise and progress and its downfal [*sic*] and overthrow is the greatest, the most essential, and the most striking part of this revelation of St. John.”⁷²⁴ The interpretive challenge, then, was for Sherwood to go from Popery to the mother land. Sherwood creatively expanded the scope of Antichrist Rome by associating the “image of the beast” in Revelation 13:14-15 with any entity, especially rulers and governments, that bear the marks of the Roman church’s corruptions.⁷²⁵ Sherwood equated the image with any form of tyranny and persecution, with Rome being “the head-quarters of tyranny and persecution.”⁷²⁶ For Sherwood Britain’s Catholic imitation was not only a recent phenomenon as its association with the Roman church went all the way back to Henry VIII where the “second beast” broke off from the first, yet retained many of its original’s features.⁷²⁷

Sherwood acknowledged that while the prophecies of the woman’s flight into the wilderness can apply to multiple historical situations the American case was particularly relevant, noting: “This American quarter of the globe seemed to be reserved in providence, as a fixed and settled habitation for God’s church, where she might have property of her own, and the right of rule and government, so as not to be controul’d and oppress’d in her civil and religious liberties, by the tyrannical and persecuting powers of

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁷²⁵ Stein, “An Apocalyptic Rationale,” 214.

⁷²⁶ Sherwood, *The Church’s Flight*, 14.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 44-47.

the earth, represented by the great red dragon.”⁷²⁸ The American experience would have apocalyptic consequences since it was to be made an eschatological example of God. Sherwood attested that so far America’s flourishing in the wilderness “are in a manner unequalled, and marvelous; and are reckoned among the most glorious events that are to be found in history, in these latter ages of the world,” yet there would be even more glorious events to come.⁷²⁹

With the future of the nation bound by eschatological consequences it was imperative for the colonists to fight not just for political liberty but also for “the great evangelical law of liberty.”⁷³⁰ Sherwood’s sermon was preached a week after the appearance of an anonymous pamphlet titled *Common Sense*.⁷³¹ Political tracts like Thomas Paine’s utilizing incendiary apocalyptic language, taken together with sermons such as Sherwood’s with biblical exegesis utilizing vivid political terms, proved to be a powerful combination. Nathan Hatch sees in the merging of apocalyptic tracts and sermons with the political language of American exceptionalism being the hallmarks of an emerging “civil millennialism.”⁷³² Ruth Bloch writes, “If religion was politicized, so was politics sacralized. Not only did ministers respond to the imperial crisis by preaching about liberty and tyranny in the language of the radical Whigs, but the very terms

⁷²⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 5 (unnumbered in Introduction).

⁷³¹ Stein, “An Apocalyptic Rationale,” 212. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, on the following interesting Subjects* (Philadelphia: R. Bell, 1776).

⁷³² Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 23.

‘liberty’ and ‘tyranny’ were deeply infused with religious, even spiritual, meaning.”⁷³³ Whether the “civil millennialism” or a Republican religiosity became a sustained program is difficult to ascertain. Mark Noll contends, “However much themes of civil liberty and resistance to tyranny dominated the occasional pulpit, they did not come at the expense of personal salvation, nor did they signal a new ‘civil religion.’”⁷³⁴ My own analysis argues that evidence of a form of civic millennialism is much stronger during the period of Protestant institutionalization at the turn of the century. This has partly to do with the strong influence of the Edwardsean tradition during this period.

Although New Divinity Edwardseans were just as patriotic as any group in New England, they confronted the events of the Revolution with a foundational approach much different than the Whig party or even most religious revolutionaries. As early as 1762 Bellamy preached his only election sermon where he anticipated the millennial age to come where “the most haughty Monarchs of the Earth...be converted and become as little children.”⁷³⁵ By the 1770s when political events were coming to a head, Bellamy saw in the British monarchy the haughtiness that sought to conquer the “rebels.” Bellamy

⁷³³ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 63. Radical Whigs in British politics were strong advocates of liberal policies, often in opposition to a strong monarchy. Whigs in colonial America identified with the liberties associated with democratic Republicanism. In general, Republicans embodied a strong individualism that favored States’ rights versus Federalists who stood for a strong central government. For political identification and millennialism, see Ruth H. Bloch, “The Social and Political Base of Millennial Literature in Late Eighteenth-Century America,” *American Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (September 1988).

⁷³⁴ Noll, *America’s God*, 131.

⁷³⁵ Joseph Bellamy, *A Sermon Delivered before the General Assembly* (New London, CT: n.p., 1762), 6.

urged his congregation to take up arms and prepare to fight.⁷³⁶ Bellamy's son-in-law, Levi Hart (1738-1808), and Jonathan Edwards Jr. were younger New Divinity theologians trained by Bellamy who preached revolutionary sermons calling for the colonists to be ready in preparation for war.⁷³⁷ But just as they based their theological foundations on the moral government of God, according to Mark Valeri, they "eschewed civil millennialism" in favor of arguments from moral law and virtue ethics.⁷³⁸

Bellamy avoided as much as possible the Federalist language that bound the colonists under a national covenant in favor an overarching principle of God's moral order.⁷³⁹ The primary focus on the idea of a divine moral government allowed Bellamy and the Edwardseans to better disentangle the contradictions and paradoxes that emerge when unlike things come together. During the Revolutionary period, the convenient marriage of Federal theology and Republican politics into a form of "civil millennialism" was bound to produce unwanted progeny. For example, many thorny theological questions arose after the Revolution: How do the unconverted fit in to the overall schema of a new republic founded upon a hard-fought political and spiritual liberty? What happens if America fails to live up to the covenantal terms of liberty? Bellamy and New Divinity leaders were prepared to hold the new nation accountable through its appeal to the divine law; the retributive justice of God would still be in effect whether or not

⁷³⁶ Mark Valeri, "The New Divinity and the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (October 1989): 741.

⁷³⁷ Valeri, "The New Divinity and the American Revolution," 742-742.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, 745.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, 769. See also Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 150.

America was to gain independence.⁷⁴⁰ Mark Valeri writes, “In targeting American as well as British social vices after 1776, Bellamy and other New Divinity men attempted to be as consistent in their political ethics as they were in their theological orthodoxy.”⁷⁴¹

By in large Bellamy, Hopkins, and the Edwardseans did not employ apocalyptic language or ideas to foment rebellion.⁷⁴² They were as wary of a human-centric political ethics as much as they were of a human-centric theology. Bellamy warned against overemphasizing the sacredness of political freedom and liberty lest they be turned into idols.⁷⁴³ Hopkins, who had witnessed firsthand the self-centered cruelty of British forces after having to flee his congregation in Newport due to it being a strategic military port nevertheless refrained from framing the war as a sacred cause. So although he criticized British tyranny using the arguments of disinterested benevolence, calling for the colonists to boycott British goods, he understood that moral judgments could go both ways.⁷⁴⁴ Even after American victory Edwardseans continued to be cautious patriots. During the period of the 1780s, Bellamy was too frail to be engaged in the rapidly changing landscape of the new nation’s political climate. Hopkins was a staunch Federalist but he was always mindful to avoid conflating the spiritual with the temporal.

⁷⁴⁰ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy’s New England*, 150, 156, 162.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷⁴² Melvin B. Endy, “Just War, Holy War, and Millennium in Revolutionary America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (January 1985): 16-18.

⁷⁴³ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy’s New England*, 163.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

Through the Revolutionary period Edwardseans remained politically conservative. Given their eschatological bent what may be surprising was their theological conservatism. This, I argue, can be best explained by their strong adherence to an Edwardsean apocalypticism, which often sought to transcend the temporal. In the matrix of Edwardsean apocalypticism, conversion, redemption, and holy affections took precedence over worldly matters. Politics would always take a back seat to the rightful preparation of the church for future glory. In their sermons leading up to the Revolution, Edwardseans did not employ apocalyptically political language or rely on a nationalistic platform of patriotic millennial exceptionalism.⁷⁴⁵ They instead emphasized that resistance was necessary because of British vice and moral corruption, that in order to be one the right side of God's history America was to be the virtuous nation lest the fight for independence be in vain.⁷⁴⁶ In the ongoing battle for the soul of the nation Edwardseans of the first generation led by example in showing the next generation their eschatological priorities—they were to remain focused more on the revolution of hearts and minds than on the Revolution brought upon by the whims of political change. For Edwardseans, it was not a theological certainty that Revelation should lead to Revolution, but it could be used to justify the ethics of the war by turning it into a godly moral crusade based on the normative justice of God. But even as they rejected using Revelation to foment Revolution, the Revolution re-centered Edwardsean apocalypticism to a fuller embrace of an eschatological ethics. After throwing off the yoke of immoral rulers, no longer could

⁷⁴⁵ Valeri, "New Divinity and the Revolution," 759-760.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 757-759.

the young nation blame British tyranny for their disobedience to God or for their moral failures.⁷⁴⁷ The afflictive nature of Edwardsean apocalypticism tempered the Revolution as a guarded victory, with a cautious self-critical eye on the future of the new nation.

New World: Missions, Manumission, and the Millennium

Bellamy and Hopkins's eschatological ethics formed the foundations of their advocacy for missions and social reform. The area where New Divinity ministers were in overwhelming consensus and most willing to be socially and politically active was in their support of missions. A successful Revolution had put America at the forefront of a new era of globalization. That the French Revolution unexpectedly followed in quick succession made it seem as if history was swinging on a hinge with a whole new world order opening up before their very eyes. Since Edwardseans were strongly pro-revival it is not a surprise that they were at the forefront of establishing the earliest missionary societies.⁷⁴⁸ Where Edwards had served as the model of the indefatigable theologian, David Brainerd was the New Divinity model for the long-suffering missionary.⁷⁴⁹ Brainerd was the quintessential representation of Edward's virtue ethics of "benevolence or love to being in general."

Hopkins magnified Edwards's abstract ideal of "love to being in general" into a more concrete form of "disinterested benevolence," an ethic of self-denying love where

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 767.

⁷⁴⁸ Foster, *Genetic History of the New England Theology*, 129.

⁷⁴⁹ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 47.

one was willing to be damned for the salvation of others.⁷⁵⁰ Hopkins tried to clarify this controversial position with a treatise of a dialogue between a semi-Calvinist and a Calvinist but that did not prevent his distractors from criticizing the ethic as espousing a desire for self-immolation.⁷⁵¹ Yet many were challenged to follow the example of Brainerd, who in turn, was modeling his self-denying life on Christ, Moses, and Apostle Paul in willing to give up their lives for the salvation of souls. A prime example of an Edwardsean who carried on the spirit of Brainerd was Gideon Hawley (1727-1807), a teacher of Indians under Edwards at Stockbridge. He followed in Brainerd's footsteps by attempting to minister to the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.⁷⁵² In his diaries he wrote during the difficult times on the mission field he was sustained only by the Bible and the *Life of Brainerd*.⁷⁵³ Driven by a strong sense of disinterested benevolence, Hawley devoted his entire life to the Indians at Marshpee in Cape Cod from 1758 till his death in 1807.⁷⁵⁴ In the 1790s, Edwards's *Life of Brainerd*, Bellamy's consistent Calvinism based on the moral government of God, and Hopkins's ideals of disinterested

⁷⁵⁰ Samuel Hopkins, "An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness," in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 3 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865), 46. See footnote.

⁷⁵¹ Samuel Hopkins, "A Dialogue Between a Calvinist and a Semi-Calvinist," in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 3 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865), 143-157. For an early critical interpretation of disinterested benevolence see Wendell O. Elsbree, "Samuel Hopkins and His Doctrine of Benevolence," *The New England Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (December 1935): 539-594. Elsbree argues there is not much of a difference between Hopkins's views and extreme Hindu mysticism, see 538. See also David S. Lovejoy, "Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery, and the Revolution," *New England Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (June 1967): 233.

⁷⁵² Pettit, editor's introduction to WJE 7:18.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

benevolence formed a triumvirate of sources that would go on to spur a whole new generation of New Divinity-branded young men (and some women), in the mold of Brainerd and Hawley, into missional action.

Given the radical ethic of disinterested benevolence and the millennial framework of New Divinity thought, Edwardsean advocacy for missions over time became intricately tied to the abolition of slavery. Before 1770, both Bellamy and Hopkins largely ignored the issue of slavery. As covered in Chapter 3, Edwards owned slaves and his position on slavery was equivocal and conservative. In the only known instance of Edwards addressing slavery he was defensive, more critical of the criticisms against ministers owning slaves than in offering constructive arguments one way or the other.⁷⁵⁵ Edwards seemed to justify owning slaves as long as it was a legal, just, and of beneficial transaction, but on the whole was against raiding nations for them.⁷⁵⁶ Of course this was not particular to Edwards as it was a popular position amongst New England Congregationalists—willing to tolerate existing slaveholding while condemning the slave trade. It was when Hopkins was installed at Newport in 1770 that he saw firsthand the gross injustices of the slave trade and became a staunch abolitionist. Hopkins’s abolitionist conversion was aided by Sarah Osborn (1714-1796), a lay leader at the First Congregational Church who had originally helped recruit Hopkins.⁷⁵⁷ She was an

⁷⁵⁵ Draft Letter on Slavery, Northampton, c. 1738, in WJE 16:71-73.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 74-76.

⁷⁵⁷ Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “All Things Were New and Astonishing: Edwardsian Piety, the New Divinity, and Race,” in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 123.

extraordinarily gifted and pious woman who led the renowned “Religious Female Society” in Newport, a group of women dedicated to devotional and prayer meetings.⁷⁵⁸ In 1765 Osborn began meeting with several slaves for Bible study and prayer on Sundays and just a year later an “Ethiopian Society” of free blacks who met at her house on Tuesdays was formed.⁷⁵⁹ The little revivals in her home she called “astonishing” and in Edwardsean term, “surprizing” [*sic*].⁷⁶⁰ A group of free black men who attended those meetings founded the Free African Union Society (FAUS) in 1780, an organization devoted to advancing societal opportunities for freed slaves.⁷⁶¹

In 1776 Hopkins published his *Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans* (written two years earlier), where he argued that slavery was a “great and public sin,” and dedicated the work to the “Honourable Members of the Continental Congress, Representatives of the Thirteen United American Colonies:

AS God the Great Father of the Universe, has made you the fathers of these Colonies; and in answer to the prayers of his people, given you counsel, and that wisdom and integrity, in the exertion of which, you have been such great and extensive blessings, and obtained the approbation and applause of your constituents, and the respect and veneration of the nations in whose sight you have acted, in the important, noble struggle for LIBERTY: We naturally look to you in behalf of more than half a million of persons in these Colonies, who are under such a degree of oppression and tyranny, as to be wholly deprived of all civil and personal liberty, to which they have as good a right as any of their fellow men, and are

⁷⁵⁸ Hambrick-Stowe, “All Things Were New and Astonishing,” 126.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷⁶⁰ Mary Beth Norton, “‘My Resting Reaping Times’: Sarah Osborn’s Defense of Her ‘Unfeminine’ Activities, 1767,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2, no. 2 (1976): 519. Cited in Hambrick-Stowe, “All Things Were New and Astonishing,” 127.

⁷⁶¹ Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 312.

reduced to the most abject state of bondage and slavery, without any just cause.⁷⁶²

While political speeches were made before the Continental Congress in 1776, many treating “liberty” as a sacred cause, Hopkins made known his universal ethic in advocating for the immediate end to slavery. For Hopkins it would offend the moral government of God for the Continental Congress to fight Britain in the name of liberty and to pray for deliverance while they tolerated the enslavement of nearly half a million—such hypocrisy was just cause for divine punishment.⁷⁶³

Hopkins was an early advocate for the re-colonization of former slaves to Africa. He joined a segment of abolitionists who held a pessimistic view of even freed slaves being able to gain fair entrance into white society. His repatriation plan of sending former slaves back to Africa as missionaries was in one-part indictment, one-part practical solution against persistent racism. But through Hopkins’s millennialism it was also seen as God’s wise providence to further the work of redemption. When he failed to garner financial backing it was his eschatological outlook that spurred him on.⁷⁶⁴ In 1793 Hopkins went before the Providence Society to make a final pitch for African repatriation, which was published as *A Discourse upon the Slave Trade and the Slavery of Africans*, where it borrowed from his *Treatise on the Millennium*, published earlier in

⁷⁶² Samuel Hopkins, *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans; Shewing it to be the Duty and Interest of the American States to Emancipate all their African Slaves* (Norwich, CT: Judah P. Spooner, 1776), 8, 11.

⁷⁶³ Hopkins, *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans*, 58.

⁷⁶⁴ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 148.

the year, to argue that slavery must be part of the sixth vial of history, which Revelation warned would be a particularly evil time.⁷⁶⁵ He wrote:

A future judgment, an eternity to come, will unfold the whole, of which we can now have but a transient glimpse. THIS enormous iniquity, and wide-spreading evil, the Slave-Trade, with its consequences, which has been carried on and advanced to such a degree for more than a century, by kings and their people in the Christian world, is an evidence, among many others, and serves to confirm the opinion, that the sixth vial, mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of the Revelation, has been running during this time. It is there predicted, that under this vial three unclean spirits, the spirits of devils, working miracles, or wonderful things, should go forth to the whole world, to gather them together to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.⁷⁶⁶

But this period would soon give way to the seventh vial, a signal of the coming kingdom of God. The sooner the end of slavery, the sooner the millennial reign of Christ would be established. In the speech Hopkins bellowed:

BUT, be this as it may, we may be assured that we are engaged in a cause which will finally prosper. The Slave-Trade, and all slavery, shall be totally abolished, and the gospel shall be preached to all nations; good shall be brought out of all the evil which takes place, and all men shall be united into one family and kingdom under Christ the Saviour, and the meek shall inherit the earth, and delight themselves in the abundance of peace. In the prospect of this, we may rejoice in the midst of the darkness and evils which now surround us; and think ourselves happy, if we may be, in any way, the active instruments of hastening on this desirable predicted event.⁷⁶⁷

Hopkins believed that slavery was an evil that God was using to bring good to Africa through the conversion of the continent by repatriated missionaries. Toward the

⁷⁶⁵ Samuel Hopkins, *A Discourse Upon the Slave-trade, and the Slavery of the Africans* (Providence, RI: J. Carter, 1793), 14.

⁷⁶⁶ Hopkins, *A Discourse Upon the Slave-trade*, 14.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

end of his lifelong fight against slavery he expressed his confidence that slavery “will not only have an end, but is designed by the Most High to be the means of introducing the gospel among the nations of Africa.”⁷⁶⁸ Hopkins’s African colonization efforts encouraged a program of evangelical activism with eschatological overtones that was not relegated only to Africa, but eventually to the whole world, including the eventual conversion of the Jews.⁷⁶⁹ Joseph Conforti sees this as part of a larger millennial vision of the future. In writing a biography of the pious Sarah Osborn in *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn* (1799), Hopkins celebrated the life of someone who imbibed the Edwardsean piety of the New Divinity.⁷⁷⁰ Her life, in turn, touched the lives of many of the slaves and free blacks she taught and spiritually nurtured, which Charles Hambrick-Stowe commemorates in recognizing the list of subscribers to Hopkins’s *System of Doctrines* (1793), where only under Rhode Island one finds a category of “Free Blacks” with seventeen names of men and women, “the black Edwardsdians,” most of them of Osborn’s and Hopkins’s spiritual lineage.⁷⁷¹ Edwardsean piety, as well as New Divinity social reform movements, would increasingly be realized through women and blacks who read the *System of Doctrines* and the *Treatise on the Millennium*. Hopkins’s challenge and vision of the future in the *Treatise* opened the door to different iterations of a more

⁷⁶⁸ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 147.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁷⁰ Hambrick-Stowe, “All Things Were New and Astonishing,” 126-127. Samuel Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn, who Died at Newport, Rhode Island, on the Second Day of August, 1796* (Worcester, MA: Leonard Worcester, 1799).

⁷⁷¹ Hambrick-Stowe, “All Things Were New and Astonishing,” 127, 131-132.

robust and diverse social millennial utopianism that would arise in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷²

The historical-redemptive apocalypticism of Edwards was not watered down or diffracted by his first generation disciples of the New Divinity. Instead, they turned their focus on making the millennium a reality in everyday lives. Both Bellamy and Hopkins were willing to provide a millennial mirror to New England and the newly formed nation. With the benefit of hindsight, abolitionism serves as a compelling measure of the historical consciousness and the critical mirror of New Divinity thought. Hopkins was said to have gone door to door to persuade his neighbors to free their slaves.⁷⁷³ In one episode confirmed by both sides, Hopkins confronted Bellamy about freeing his slave, to which Bellamy stated that he thought his slave was so happy he would refuse his freedom even if offered. They called the slave in and Hopkins asked if he were happy, to which he answered yes. Hopkins then asked: “Would you be *more* happy if you were free?” The slave answered yes, to which Bellamy responded: “From this moment you are free.”⁷⁷⁴

Although Hopkins and New Divinity leaders made significant progress in mobilizing the social reform program of manumission, the Continental Congress did not abolish slavery in 1776. Nor did they in any other meeting afterward. By the time Hopkins wrote the *Treatise on the Millennium* in 1793, seventeen long years had passed without the desired resolution. In the entirety of the *Treatise* there is no mention of

⁷⁷² Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 173.

⁷⁷³ Park, “Memoirs,” in WSH 1:118.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

American Independence or the civil millennialism of America's role in future glory.⁷⁷⁵ Given that the *Treatise* might in part be a critique of slavery, seen through this prophetic lens Hopkins's curious dedication of the work to those living in the future millennium makes more sense.⁷⁷⁶ Although the younger Edwards saw it as fanciful and wished it removed, Hopkins chose to keep it in. The dedication asked those living in the future to judge the failures of the present, a prescient critique of the current situation, and challenged future generations to keep an understanding, yet judicial eye of the past. Edwards, Bellamy, and Hopkins were not optimists in any psychological sense. They were only so within a millennial confidence in the moral government of God where in the end, love would win. Otherwise they were keen to cast a critical eye on whomever or whatever lost sight of the millennial ideal. In their generations, all three were more often than not, glass half-empty realists. Hopkins wrote of the not yet:

Christians in general are still in a great degree of darkness... The Scripture has not been so well and so fully understood, as it will be in the days of the millennium, when the Spirit of God shall be poured out on Christians in general, in much greater degrees than it has been...⁷⁷⁷

Although the failure of immediate manumission was disappointing, Hopkins believed that the increase of sin would precede the millennium.⁷⁷⁸ But what the world of Hopkins reveals is that the subject was not academic. His parishioners such as Sarah Osborn lived, breathed and reveled in this afflictive, paradoxical hope of future glory.

⁷⁷⁵ McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 618-619.

⁷⁷⁶ Bryant, "From Edwards to Hopkins," 61.

⁷⁷⁷ Hopkins, "Nature and Design," 163.

⁷⁷⁸ Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World*, 311.

New Divinity: Edwardsean Millennialists of the New England Theology

To what extent an intellectual idea takes hold in society is always difficult to measure. It can be argued that New Divinity as a theological school of thought was provincial and mostly relegated to a particular denomination, region, or segment of the population. But ideas are disseminated by people. And this is where New Divinity thought can be commoditized—through the network of influential individuals who embodied and disseminated these ideas. Perhaps more than the system that Bellamy and Hopkins developed, their greatest contribution in memorializing Edwards was in raising up a generation of ministers trained in Edwardsean thought.⁷⁷⁹ In the aftermath of the Great Awakening, Bellamy felt the inadequacy of traditional schools like Harvard and Yale in preparing young men for the ministry of vital piety. Bellamy was a close observer of his friend, David Brainerd, who was expelled from Yale for allegedly saying of a tutor that he had “no more grace than a chair” and wondering why Rector Thomas Clap “did not drop down dead” when he fined students for following Gilbert Tennent in his itinerating.⁷⁸⁰ Bellamy opened his home to budding revival preachers seeking New Light accreditation. During this time, college students with high social rank were increasingly pursuing careers outside the clergy. The early makeshift schools of New Light ministers attracted the hard-working, upstart students without social standing seeking upward

⁷⁷⁹ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 24-25. This section is highly indebted to Conforti’s entire second chapter: “The Great Awakening and the School of the Prophets,” 23-40.

⁷⁸⁰ Pettit, editor’s introduction to WJE 7:42.

mobility. But more so than advancement, many of them sought a fraternity of those in pursuit of an evangelical, vibrant faith.

For his theological school, Bellamy found inspiration in the model of Edwards's parsonage where he spent some time for further theological studies. Bellamy's "school of the prophets" became a precursor to divinity schools and seminaries where young college graduates would gain additional training in preparation for the ministry.⁷⁸¹ Bellamy trained many of the prominent New Light ministers of the next generation such as Jonathan Edwards Jr., John Smalley (1734-1820), and many others, including at one time the future vice president, Aaron Burr Jr. (1756-1836). In turn John Smalley taught Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840), perhaps New Divinity's most prolific mentor, who would go on to train up another generation of New Divinity men, sending ninety into ministerial positions.⁷⁸² And so on the chain of Edwardsean spirituality and theological training advanced.

To be sure these students were grounded in the theological dogmas of an evangelical Calvinism, but they were also equipped with an intellectual robustness that belied the rustic backwardness of their parishes. They were taught that the more refined their theological and intellectual grounding the more they would be open to God's revelation and spiritual insights into the deeper things of scripture. Mark Valeri contends that Edwards bequeathed to his disciples a cosmopolitan intellectual heritage that

⁷⁸¹ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 35. I believe Conforti uses the term "School of the Prophets" to distinguish the purpose of these theological house academies dedicated to training up pious church leaders from the more traditional institutions of ministerial training such as Harvard and Yale.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*

prepared them to engage in defending evangelical Calvinism not only from provincial theological attacks, but against the forces of Enlightenment thought—to gird them from the sophisticated theologies arising from Glasgow, London, Paris, and the Old World.⁷⁸³ Bellamy guided his students through Edwards’s favorite theological authors, Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706) and Frances Turretin (1623-1687), but also challenged them with English moral philosophers Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), and David Hume (1711-1776).⁷⁸⁴ The motivation for their intensive pursuit of knowledge also had an eschatological edge; they were preparing for the lead up to the millennium. During the time of peace and prosperity there would no longer be a need for such “specialized teachers” as they would be “all taught by God.”⁷⁸⁵ Furthermore, these informal training schools fostered an in-group consciousness of being part of a larger movement. Joseph Conforti delves into the social history of like-minded individuals by connecting lifelong relationships fostered in their college years, mostly from Yale, to New Divinity finishing schools and then to a fellowship of ministerial associations. Many found spouses from these networks, fortifying kinship ties based upon New Divinity relationships.⁷⁸⁶ Through these men and women New Divinity would become a theological force in Western Massachusetts, much of the Connecticut River Valley areas,

⁷⁸³ Mark Valeri, “Jonathan Edwards, the New Divinity, and Cosmopolitan Calvinism,” in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19, 27, 30.

⁷⁸⁴ Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards on Education and His Educational Legacy,” in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43.

⁷⁸⁵ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 38.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

and eventually through the western frontiers and then all of New England up until the first half of the Second Great Awakening in the 1820s.

What characterized New Divinity theology was the attempt at an intellectual consistency between a conservative Calvinism and the concurrent moral philosophies of the day. Edwards was its progenitor but his unexpected early death put Bellamy and Hopkins in positions to articulate Edwardsean thought into a coherent theological system, which came to be known as “Consistent” Calvinism or Hopkinsianism, or as with many terms that are initially used disparagingly but eventually stick, “New Divinity.”⁷⁸⁷ The “consistent” aspect of Calvinism was a firm commitment to salvation being entirely the work of God in contrast to the “conditional” Calvinism of the liberals and moderates who adopted more Arminian features of humankind’s ability to merit grace. In Edwards’s time he was criticized by liberal theologians like Charles Chauncy and the Unitarian Congregationalist Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766), who chastised the Edwardsean caricature of a monstrous God, writing:

Indeed, if instead of a wise and infinitely gracious Being, one whose kind regards are extended to all his intellectual creatures; and one who governs the world with a view at promoting the moral rectitude, and so of advancing the happiness of his creatures and offspring; I say, if instead of such a Being as this, we, in our imaginations, place at the head of the universe, a capricious, humoursome and tyrannical Being; one who loves and hates at random, and has no uniform, consistent, and benevolent design; we form a scheme of principles, more destructive of rational happiness than that of *Atheism* itself..⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

⁷⁸⁸ Jonathan Mayhew, *Seven Sermons Upon the Following Subjects; viz. The Difference Betwixt Truth and Falshood, Right and Wrong. The Natural Abilities of Men for Discerning these Differences. The Right and Duty of Private Judgement. Objections Considered. The Love of God. The Love of our Neighbour. The First and Great Commandment* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1749), 106-107.

This was the typical line of attack against Edwardseanism from which Bellamy and Hopkins sought to defend. For the sake of intellectual robustness Bellamy and Hopkins placed a high priority on theological reasoning as the best method of ensuring quality in thought and even in a minister's moral character. New Divinity theology sought to combine a strong Calvinism with the heart and "heat" (an Edwardsean term) of evangelical piety and revivalism.⁷⁸⁹

The great foils in Edwards's time was an encroaching Arminianism in the theological circles of liberal Calvinism and the excesses of an unfettered antinomianism of the separatist party, represented by firebrand radicals like Andrew Croswell. Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated*, to which Edwards wrote the preface, was a rhetorical attack against the perceived errors of both, using the language and philosophical categories of Enlightenment moral philosophy.⁷⁹⁰ In the preface Edwards wrote:

The remarkable things that have come to pass, in late times, respecting the state of religion, I think, will give every wise observer great reason to determine that the counterfeits of the grace of God's spirit are many more than have been generally taken notice of heretofore; and that, therefore, we stand in great need of having the certain distinguishing nature and marks of genuine religion more clearly and distinctly set forth than has been usual.⁷⁹¹

Here, we recognize Edwards referring back to the language of his *Distinguishing Marks* sermon. Edwards took notice of the increased "counterfeits" of the gospel, hardly an

⁷⁸⁹ For Edwards's use of "heat" see Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2, Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

⁷⁹⁰ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 48-50.

⁷⁹¹ Jonathan Edwards, preface to *True Religion Delineated*, iv.

indication of the optimistic signs of the approaching glorious times of the church. The preface stands out as one of the more cynical of Edwards's compositions, without even the usual allusions of ultimate Christian victory at the end. The seriousness matched the sober tone of Bellamy's work, where in the author's preface he laid out the foundations of his theological arguments in eschatological terms:

We are designed, by God our maker, for an endless existence. In this present life we just enter upon being, and are in a state introductory to a never-ending duration in another world, where we are to be forever unspeakably happy, or miserable, according to our present conduct. *This* is designed for a state of *probation*; and *that*, for a state of *rewards* and *punishments*. We are now upon trial, and God's eye is upon us every moment; and that picture of ourselves, which we exhibit in our conduct, the whole of it taken together, will give our proper character, and determine our state forever. This being designed for a state of trial, God now means to try us, that our conduct, under all the trials of life, may discover what we are, and ripen us for the day of judgment; when God will judge every man according to his works, and render to every one according to his doings...One great end he has in view, is, that he may prove them, and know what is in their hearts.⁷⁹²

The motif of God's design of life as a trial was probably not lost on Edwards, who at this time was only a month removed from his dismissal from Northampton. The introductory paragraph of Bellamy's preface even seems to parallel much of the sentiments of Edwards's farewell sermon, that in the end God would be the final judge and arbiter of all things.

Given the setup of the rewards and punishments and the designed trial and ultimate judgment of God, Bellamy wrote in the beginning that "true religion consists in

⁷⁹² Bellamy, *True Religion Delineated*, vii.

a conformity to the *law* of God, and in a compliance with the *gospel* of Christ.”⁷⁹³ This dialectical framework between the law and gospel opened New Divinity thought to attack from Arminians, who criticized Edwards and Calvinism on original sin, and separatists like Andrew Croswell, pastor of the mostly radical-leaning congregation at Boston’s Eleventh Church, who abhorred salvation being associated with anything related to the legalist language of law and works.⁷⁹⁴ More than anything, the aspect of New Divinity that pushed the boundary of Calvinism was in its theodicy. Both Bellamy and Hopkins used Edwards’s work on redemption as the basis for their controversial stance on God’s authorship of sin.⁷⁹⁵ Their boldness in taking a hyper-Calvinist position that God granted the permission of sin was intricately tied to their millennial confidence. In order to fit the narrative of redemptive history Bellamy and Hopkins had to strain theological language to the breaking point before it became too heretical.⁷⁹⁶ In “Sin the Occasion for Great Good,” Hopkins took New Divinity theodicy to its extreme logical conclusion. He wrote:

The new creation—i.e., the work of redemption—is said to be far more glorious than the first creation. “For, behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” (Isaiah lxv. 17.) Now the sin of man is the occasion of these new heavens and new earth; for the glory of Christ and his works could not have been, had not sin took place. Thus sin in general is the occasion of all that good which is comprised in the work of redemption, which, according to Scripture, so much exceeds all the good which was in the first creation.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 1

⁷⁹⁴ Leigh Eric Schmidt, ““A Second and Glorious Reformation” New Light Extremism of Andrew Croswell,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 2, (April 1986): 241. For background on Croswell’s influence on Boston’s Congregational Churches, see George W. Harper, *A People So Favored of God: Boston’s Congregational and Their Pastors* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 148-162.

⁷⁹⁵ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 258.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

The world, considered as fallen, or sinful, and redeemed by Christ, is better and far more glorious than it was considered as without sin, according of Scripture.⁷⁹⁷

In Bellamy's millennium sermon he expounded upon a footnote regarding his calculations on the number who will be saved: "Holy Scriptures encourage us to look for things exceeding great and glorious; even for such events as may put a new face on all God's past dispensations."⁷⁹⁸ This was a lesson that could have come directly from the mouth of Edwards himself. Bellamy and Hopkins were putting a new face on old dispensations, another reason why Bellamy had referred to their brand of true religion as "experimental religion."⁷⁹⁹

Hopkins's *Sin, thro' Divine Interposition, an Advantage to the Universe*, was a rebuttal of Samuel Webster (1718-1796), a Harvard-educated Arminian-leaning minister who attacked the idea of the imputation of Adam's sin to his descendants.⁸⁰⁰ Hopkins argued that not only did God give permission to sin as Bellamy had written earlier in his *Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin*, but that God, in His sovereignty, created sin in order to overrule it in its consequences.⁸⁰¹ Hopkins knew this was a controversial position but in the end he was willing to hang everything on the absoluteness of the sovereignty of

⁷⁹⁷ Samuel Hopkins, "Sin the Occasion for Great Good," in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 2 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865), 503.

⁷⁹⁸ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 158.

⁷⁹⁹ William M. Schweitzer, "An Uncommon Union: Understanding Jonathan Edwards's Experimental Calvinism," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2, no. 2 (2010): 208-209.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 65. Samuel Hopkins, *Sin, Thro' Divine Interposition, an Advantage to the Universe; and yet This No Excuse for Sin, or Encouragement to it* (Boston: J. Kneeland, 1773). Original printing in 1759.

⁸⁰¹ Schweitzer, "An Uncommon Union," 67.

God, which was often the default theological position of Edwards. Hopkins's assurance came from his apocalyptic vantage point. This can be seen even in *Sin, thro' Divine Interposition*, where in the appendix to the second edition Hopkins stood his ground amidst a growing chorus of critics:

The longer I live, and the more I attend to the word of God, and the nature of true religion, the more I am confirmed in the belief of the truth and importance of the principal subject of the foregoing sermons; viz. that sin shall be the occasion of the greatest good: That God's perfections shall be manifested in an unspeakably more bright and glorious manner and degree; his kingdom shall be more glorious; and there shall be immensely more holiness and happiness forever, than could have been, if sin had not been permitted.⁸⁰²

On top of Arminianism and antinomianism, another perceived counterfeit threat to true religion, especially in New England, was Unitarianism and Universalism. In 1783 Hopkins published *An Inquiry Concerning the Future State of Those Who Die in Their Sins*, a work intended to counter the blowing winds of universalism and a liberal faction in New England espousing the doctrine that eventually all mankind would be saved.⁸⁰³ The Universalists could not envision that a truly benevolent God could condemn sinners to an endless punishment. Hopkins advanced an argument that Edwards had made—that since sin was an infinite evil, it necessitated an infinite punishment.⁸⁰⁴ The overriding theme of the inquiry was the government of God.⁸⁰⁵ Just as Edwardsean apocalypticism

⁸⁰² Hopkins, "Appendix" in *Sin, Thro' Divine Interposition*, 8.

⁸⁰³ Samuel Hopkins, *An Inquiry Concerning the Future State of Those Who Die in Their Sins* (Newport, RI: Solomon Southwick, 1783).

⁸⁰⁴ Foster, *Genetic History of the New England Theology*. 195-196.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

fell under the overall rubric of the sovereignty of God, Hopkins implemented an eschatological structure based on the righteous governing functions of God, who as the moral Governor, could not tolerate what brings harm to His divine government, thereby giving justification to rewards and punishments.⁸⁰⁶ For Hopkins and the advocates of the New Divinity, a temporal appeal to divine retributive justice would not only result in moral corruption, but it was a slippery slope toward a complete capitulation to a human-centered faith built upon rationalistic foundations, one that would then deny biblical concepts such as Hell and eternal damnation. Hopkins warned:

And if the disbelief of endless punishment, and even of any future punishment at all, should now prevail, and have a wider spread than ever before, it will be doubtless owing to a greater and more general prevalence of blinding moral corruption, and the greater power of Satan, which is foretold he shall have in the world, previous to the flourishing of the kingdom of Christ: Which will produce a remarkable degree of infatuation and error, even *strong delusion*, in believing that first and most pernicious LIE, which the great deceiver told in this world, and has been ever since endeavouring to propagate, Ye Shall Not Surely Die. And it may be justly expected, that the propagation of this delusion, will promote a total disregard to divine revelation.⁸⁰⁷

Edward's *A History of the Work of Redemption* was the main text from which Bellamy and Hopkins drew their eschatological inspiration. In a letter to John Erskine

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁰⁷ Hopkins, *An Inquiry Concerning the Future State*, 85. In a footnote to the excerpt above, Hopkins referenced Revelation 16:13-14 that speaks of the time when the unclean spirits of devils (John's vision of three unclean frogs) will work miracles and gather the forces of evil before the battle of Armageddon. It seems that by "previous to the flourishing of the kingdom of Christ," Hopkins meant before the millennium, even though the Revelation reference refers to the working of the miracles by the unclean spirits as occurring in preparation for the great battle at the end of the millennium. This does not necessarily say anything meaningful in terms of Hopkins's overall apocalyptic chronology, which seems to accept a time of great apostasy both before and toward the end of the millennium. This is just another example where the ambiguity of eschatological terms and how and in what context they are employed makes it difficult to put commentators on Revelation into rigid categories such as pre or post-millennial.

before Edwards's death, Bellamy expressed to the Scottish revivalist how much he longed to see it in print, writing: "Tho' I long to see Mr Edwards ['] confutation of the different branches of Arminianism, yet I more long to see his intended history of Man's redemption. From such a pen upon such a subject, something highly valuable may be expected. May a kind providence preserve from danger a life so important!"⁸⁰⁸ While Bellamy and Hopkins based much of the theological implications of the work of redemption, i.e., soteriology, Christology, and theodicy, on the moral government of God (law), giving New Divinity its harsh hyper-Calvinistic reputation, their theological anthropology was based on Edwards's ethical writings, predicated on God's love (grace).

In *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765) Edwards deliberated on the question of the nature of true virtue by restating it: What is it that renders a habit, disposition, or exercise of the heart morally beautiful?⁸⁰⁹ His answer was the "benevolence to being in general," or a consent or disposition toward union with God's being of universal love.⁸¹⁰ Hopkins followed in the line of two of Edwards's favorite theological authors, Petrus van Mastricht and Frances Turretin in translating this concept as "disinterested benevolence," in his *An Inquiry Into the Nature of True Holiness* (1773), by which he defined it as "the love in which God's holiness consists. Therefore we are called upon to imitate this love of God, as that by which we may be like him, partakers of his holiness."⁸¹¹ God's

⁸⁰⁸ Joseph Bellamy, "Bellamy Papers," *Hartford Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1967): 66.

⁸⁰⁹ *The Nature of True Virtue*, in WJE 8:539.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 541-543.

⁸¹¹ Peter Jauhiainen, "Samuel Hopkins and Hopkinsianism," in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford

disinterested love was contrasted to self-love and a host of self-centered particularities of loves that sometimes had merely the appearance of impartiality.⁸¹² In response to critics who viewed Edwards's ethics of true virtue too metaphysical, Hopkins used simpler terms like holiness and "love to God and to neighbor, including ourselves," to clarify the evangelical position.⁸¹³ Hopkins turned what Sang Hyun Lee refers to as Edwards's dispositional ontology into the language of evangelical grace-works.

Although Bellamy and Hopkins provided the theological and metaphysical justifications for Consistent Calvinism, just like Edwards they both considered themselves, first and foremost, pastors. Their theological stance, no matter how metaphysical, always retained an element of a practical theology that was related to either the spiritual advancement of their parishioners or a soteriology suited for revival. This pastoral concern is reflected anecdotally in the very personal letters they wrote in earnest plea for evangelical conversion. In April 3, 1775, Bellamy wrote to his son, Jonathan:

Death comes unexpected! Poor _____! And what if your turn should be next? I hear Mrs. _____ is lately converted. In your heavenly Father's house there is bread enough to spare. He is your Creator and the God of glory; and at a distance from him there is nothing but *husks*! My desire and prayer to God is, that my son Jonathan may be saved. And then, whatever happens to America or to you, this year or next, you will be happy forever...⁸¹⁴

University Press, 2012), 108-109; Samuel Hopkins, *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (Newport, RI: Solomon Southwick, 1773), 44.

⁸¹² Jauhiainen, "Samuel Hopkins and Hopkinsianism," 109.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸¹⁴ Edwards, "Memoir," in WJB 1:xxxix-xl.

Bellamy also composed a series of letters to his daughter, Betsey, and her husband, Charles Sheldon. In one addressed shortly after their marriage, he wrote:

By this time you have formed new connections, and have a new world opened to you, with fine prospects. But your prospects will be infinitely more agreeable when you move to your Father's house, in the world above, (which will happen soon,) if you will be a good and obedient child to Him who gave you existence and all your present enjoyments. You and your husband may there be eternally happy together, as members of the community that is called '*the bride—the Lamb's wife.*'⁸¹⁵

In another, Bellamy mentioned acquaintances who were sick or passed away and challenged the couple to seek “eternal health and peace,” adding “Tell Mr. Sheldon to buy *Mr. Edwards's History of Redemption*, in which you have a map of the road to that world, and a glimpse of its glory.”⁸¹⁶ After the death of Bellamy's wife, he wrote to the couple with added urgency:

The solemn day is past, and here I sit alone, —not one left, —all my children gone, —my wife in the silent grave! I shall go next! My children and grandchildren will follow soon! This is not our home! O my dear child, when you leave this world, where do you expect to inhabit, and I what company, —in what employment? There are but two places beyond the grave. Where will you and my dear connections go? Now is the time to make your choice.⁸¹⁷

Letter after letter Bellamy exhorted, warned, encouraged, and beckoned for the unconverted couple to come to Christ so that they could resume their earthly relationships in the life thereafter.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid., xli.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., xlii.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., xliv.

Likewise, toward the end of Hopkins's life in 1802, he penned a heartfelt letter to then Vice President, Aaron Burr Jr., whom he knew since childhood. It began with a poignant reminder of the circumstances of Burr's early orphancy (and implied status of a special relationship to Hopkins as Jonathan Edwards's grandson). Afterward Hopkins wrote with pained honesty:

It is reported, and it is believed by a number, that you do not believe in divine revelation, and discard Christianity as not worthy of credit. I know this is an age of infidelity, but I do not think I have such evidence of the truth of this report, as to exclude all hope that it is not true. It would be very grievous to me, and I know it would be inexpressibly so to your pious and worthy ancestors, were they now in this world, to know that one of their posterity, for whom they had made so many prayers, who was educated in a Christian land, and is possessed of such great and distinguished natural powers of mind, was an infidel; especially as it is certain that such a character cannot be so useful as mischievous, nor can he be happy, but miserable, in this life; and, dying so, will be inconceivably miserable forever.⁸¹⁸

This is a remarkable letter on many levels. First, although Hopkins was writing to the Vice President of the United States there is nary a political sentiment, it was mainly a plea to consider salvation. Second, the letter, written right at the turn of the century, can be seen as a symbolic illustration of the sizable fissure between the generations, eras, and worldviews. Hopkins wrote of being raised in a Christian land. But already the younger Burr had rejected not only the covenant theology of New England and the faith of his illustrious ancestors, but religion altogether. Both Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and Burr were boldly forging ahead with an American ideal predicated mainly on Enlightenment thought. This seismic change of first principles was not lost on Hopkins,

⁸¹⁸ Park, "Memoir," in WSH 1: 258.

who knew that Burr was even at one time a student of theology under the tutelage of his old friend, Bellamy. Lastly, the letter reveals Hopkins's utter confidence that no matter how society marches forward, whether the new nation's leaders are infidels or not, the timeless message of the biblical truth of hope and redemption would always remain relevant.

Chapter Conclusion

Contrary to earlier historiography, New Divinity was not the dusty metaphysical system of country metaphysicians that superseded Edwardsean spirituality.⁸¹⁹ While there are subtle distinctions between Bellamy's neo-Edwardsean Consistent Calvinism and Hopkinsianism, they believed that the moral governance of God and disinterested benevolence were two sides of the same coin, forming a symbiotic relationship that informed and confirmed one another. The convergence of their theological programs form the foundations of New Divinity thought.⁸²⁰ In many ways they interpreted the more metaphysical and philosophical points of Edwardsean thought into a coherent system that could withstand Enlightenment criticism. While they were unable to successfully stem the tide of Enlightenment's encroachment on the New England theology, their works

⁸¹⁹ William Breitenbach, "Piety and Moralism: Edwards and the New Divinity," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Harry Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 177. See also Valerie, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 7. For the historiography see the bibliographic essay in Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 234-236. Conforti identifies Joseph Haroutunian's *Piety versus Moralism* as the primary source for this line of interpretation.

⁸²⁰ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 3-4.

certainly tempered the growing religious optimism brought forth by humanistic Enlightenment ideals.

Hopkins was actually quite forceful in stating that times of trouble lay ahead for the church. In *A Serious Address to Professing Christians*, a sermon on Revelation 16:5 where Christ is said to come as a thief in the night, he wrote that “the time of the greatest sufferings of the church is yet to come, and is fast approaching, and even at the door.”⁸²¹ Edwards and his New Divinity heirs are generally credited with an optimistic millennialism, but they certainly did not trumpet humanity’s progress. They expressed an afflictive view of the preparatory time before the millennium, a general ambivalence toward politics, and a bleak assessment of human sin. They were also honest about the inadequacies and limitations of human beings on this side of the world to adjudicate correctly on a number of issues. In Hopkins’s treatise, *The Nature and Design of Infant Baptism*, he wrote:

The institutions and ordinances of Christ have been, and now are, greatly misunderstood, perverted, and abused by most Christian churches and professors of religion, and great irregularities take place in attendance on them. The time preceding the millennium may be compared to the winter, when things appear in great disorder and confusion, and the influences of the sun are weak and small, and have little effect; but all is preparatory to the spring and summer, when the sun and rain will have their proper effect in producing the fruits of the earth.⁸²²

⁸²¹ Samuel Hopkins, “Serious Address to Professing Christians,” in *Sketches of the Life of the Late, Rev. Samuel Hopkins: D.D. Pastor of the First Congregational Church in Newport* (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805), 215.

⁸²² Samuel Hopkins, “The Nature and Design of Infant Baptism,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 2 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865), 150.

New Divinity made a theological impact not because it fought the theological battles of the day against true religion's cultured despisers. It flourished because it was spiritually relevant to many.⁸²³ New Divinity grew rapidly among young clergymen because it spoke to the day-to-day sensibilities of their personal faith as well as to their congregations. Moreover, Bellamy and Hopkins believed, as Edwards did, that mere theological rhetoric lacked the dynamic to enact virtuous action unless it was undergirded by the anticipatory events of the millennium, judgment, the eternal rewards and punishments of heaven and hell. They viewed the millennium as the coda to their theological system—the very best possible outcome of God's moral governance and disinterested benevolence—precisely because that is how God chose to design the work of redemption. Bellamy and Hopkins preached the entirety of the work of redemption, but like Edwards, they especially gloried in its *eschaton*.

Bellamy's millennial sermon was extremely popular and he preached it on multiple occasions.⁸²⁴ Hopkins's *Treatise on the Millennium* reintroduced Edwardsean apocalypticism to a generation raised on Enlightenment thought. Bellamy and Hopkins knew that in this new intellectual climate it would become increasingly difficult to convey that the Age of Revelation was an appropriate, even necessary conclusion to the Age of Reason. Overall, their Calvinist revisionism did not stray from Edwardsean thought; rather it pointed to God's work of redemption manifested through apocalyptic dispensations and prepared a new generation of Edwardseans for another great

⁸²³ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition*, 10.

⁸²⁴ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 128.

ingathering of souls in anticipation of the Second Great Awakening. Given these priorities it is less surprising that New Divinity leaders of the first and second generation rejected an apocalyptic interpretation of the Revolution. Like Edwards, their millennial horizon was broader, much more far-reaching and expansive than America's temporal battle for independence. They did not extol an American civil millennialism. In this sense they sustained the revivalistic and afflictive elements of Edwardsean apocalypticism. But by emphasizing America's moral compass after the Revolution and in their quest to determine the future eschatological ethics of the young nation, they opened the door for someone like Timothy Dwight to fuse America's millennial future with a sense of American exceptionalism.

CHAPTER FIVE

New Divinity at the Turn of the Century

During the critical decade of the 1780s, religion in America was in the throes of rapid transition. With the emergence of denominations like the Baptists and the Methodists, American religion stood at the precipice of major demographic changes. Baptist and Methodist successes had opened the doors to greater democratic expressions of anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment ideas.⁸²⁵ While more radical elements of faith tended to come from these upstart sects, New Divinity evangelical Calvinists, on the whole, remained hierarchical and conservative. Ever since Edwards's warnings against unchecked enthusiasm they were generally able to rein in dissent and rogue radicalism. But there were signs that the marriage of convenience between state and religion, town and congregation, the very fabric of Congregational life was being challenged from within and without. For some, this slow unraveling of the establishment was evidence of the immanence of the Second Coming.

Then came the French Revolution.⁸²⁶ During the French and Indian War it was not difficult to identify the enemy—the common Protestant refrain was that the forces of Catholic France were backed by the Romish Antichrist. The winds of change during the American Revolution temporarily shifted the Antichrist's sphere of dominion from France to British tyrants. Although it seemed as if the Revolution had proclaimed victory over tyranny itself, even for the most ardent American patriots the French Revolution

⁸²⁵ Noll, *America's God*, 149.

⁸²⁶ The execution of Louis XVI occurred in January 1793.

came as a shock. It was seen as either God's judgment against Catholic France or another victory of secularized Enlightenment ideals of freedom and liberty. The destabilizing forces of the age impacted American religious culture; it appeared as if reason had neutralized, if not triumphed over religion. New Divinity leaders of this generation had to contend with this new religious reality of increased secularization.

Millennial Concerns of the New Age

On May 19, 1780, an ominous darkness covered all of New England from morning till mid-afternoon.⁸²⁷ Known as the Dark Day of 1780, it was an event many had long anticipated from the days when apocalyptic visions from Revelation colored the view of the War for Independence.⁸²⁸ The normally reserved Ezra Stiles commented, "that a darkness of equal Intenseness & Duration has ever happened in any parts of the world, except in Egypt, and a the miraculous Eclipse at the Crucifixion of our Blessed Savior," and noted that "the Inhabitants were thereupon thrown into a phps. [*sic*] unnecessary- Consternation, as if the appearance was preternatural."⁸²⁹ Anticipation of the imminent return of Christ was always part of the Puritan DNA, exemplified by Cotton Mather, who till the end of his life thought he would be able to partake in the coming millennium. Edwards and his first disciples believed they might be in the premillennial

⁸²⁷ Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 47.

⁸²⁸ Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England*, 173.

⁸²⁹ Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, vol. 2, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 424-425. Quoted in Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England*, 47.

period leading up to the millennium, but the actual thousand-year reign would not commence until at least the twenty-first century.⁸³⁰ From the time of the publication of Bellamy's sermon, *The Millennium*, in 1758 to the period of the Revolution, millennial expressions took on a political character that was focused on the societal needs of the here and now. Coupled with the wider cultural acceptance of secular theories of progress in the 1780s, millennial theories tended to stress the socially progressive, often utopian promises of the future.⁸³¹ But in the political and social upheavals of the critical period, Edwardsean apocalypticism, with its gradualist model of progress, punctuated by occasional regress, was not satisfactorily explanatory for some.

The millennial tumult of the period is perhaps best captured by the enigmatic life of David Austin (1760-1831), a Presbyterian minister in New Jersey.⁸³² His life and millennial interests can be a case study of the gradual dissolution of Congregational hegemony in New England, as well as the reemergence of apocalyptic immanence as an antidote against the positivist ideals of progress. Austin had all the markings of a solid New Divinity theologian, graduating from Yale in 1779 and doing his post-graduate theological studies with Joseph Bellamy. For the first few years of his ministry he held

⁸³⁰ As discussed in Chapter 3, Jonathan Edwards believed the millennium would commence around the year 2000. In Chapter 4, Hopkins followed Lowman and Edwards in placing the beginning of the millennium around 2016.

⁸³¹ Bloch., *Visionary Republic*, 103.

⁸³² The curious case of David Austin is originally covered in William B. Sprague, ed., *Annals of the American Pulpit: Trinitarian Congregational*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), 195-206. In Heimert's, *Religion and the American Mind*, the focus is on Austin's political orientation. For Austin as it pertains to the discussion of pre- and post- millennialism, see Davidson, "Searching for the Millennium," 241-61. Austin's life is also treated in Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 138-141.

leadership positions in a variety of New Divinity initiatives. Having married into a wealthy family he traveled in prominent circles and it seemed like he was on the path to a productive and influential future in the ministry.⁸³³

Sometime around 1793 he took a fascination with the end times. A year later he edited and published a collection titled, *The Millennium; or, the Thousand Years of Prosperity*, which included a reprint of Edwards's *Humble Attempt* and Bellamy's *The Millennium*, as well as a discourse taken from a sermon he preached the previous year, "The Downfall of Mystical Babylon."⁸³⁴ The sermon was mostly a vitriolic Protestant condemnation of history's evil entities, especially against the Catholic Church, with a strong declaration that the initial steps to the millennium had begun with American Independence. He wrote:

If this language seem too mysterious to any, let them receive a familiar stile, and behold the regnum montis, the kingdom of the mountain, begun on the Fourth of July, 1776, when the *birth* of the MAN-CHILD—the hero of civil and religious liberty took place in these United States. Let them read the predictions of heaven respecting the increase of his dominion—that he was *to rule all nations with a rod of iron*; that is, bring them into complete and absolute subjection; and that the young hero might be equal to this mighty conquest, he is supported by an omnipotent arm; he is *caught up unto God, and to his throne*. Behold, then, this hero of America wielding the standard of civil and religious liberty over these United States! —Follow him, in his strides, across the Atlantic!"⁸³⁵

⁸³³ Nicholas Murray, "David Austin," in *Annals of the American Pulpit: Trinitarian Congregational*, vol. 2, ed. William B. Sprague (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), 195. The *Annals* heretofore referred as AAP, followed by volume and page number.

⁸³⁴ Bloch., *Visionary Republic*, 139. David Austin, *The Millennium; or, The Thousand Years of Prosperity, Promised to the Church of God* (Elizabethtown, NJ: Shepard Kollock, 1794).

⁸³⁵ Austin, "The Downfall of Mystical Babylon," 392-393.

Austin's sermon was preached in the same year Hopkins published his *Treatise on the Millennium* and after many bloody events of the French Revolution. It was not a surprise, then, that strong apocalyptic sentiments emerged with Revolution in the air. Austin wrote of two such Revolutions needing to take place:

It seems no unnatural conclusion from ancient prophecy, and from present appearances, that in order to usher in the dominion of our glorious Immanuel, as predicted to take place, and usually called the latter-day-glory, TWO GREAT REVOLUTIONS are to take place; the first outward and political; the second inward and spiritual.—The first is now taking place; its happy effects we, in this country, already enjoy; and O that the Lord would graciously put it into the hearts of his ministers and churches, nay, of all now under the dominion of civil and religious liberty, to begin the second revolution, that which is inward and spiritual, even the revolution of the heart.⁸³⁶

Austin saw the first political Revolution being accomplished in America through the “sons of men,” and now the time was ripe for the spiritual Revolution of the heart to commence through “the sons of God.”⁸³⁷

The histrionic patriotism and idiosyncratic apocalypticism aside, Austin remained at this time within the spectrum of Protestant apocalypticism, if not in the line of Bellamy and Edwards.⁸³⁸ But in 1795 he is said to have contracted scarlet fever and might have been psychologically impacted by it.⁸³⁹ While recovering he immersed himself in apocalyptic studies. That year he told his congregation he had received a vision from God

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 393-394.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., 404-405.

⁸³⁸ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 139.

⁸³⁹ Murray, “David Austin,” in AAP 2:195.

that Jesus would return soon in bodily form and he even received revelation as to the date of the beginning of the millennium, which he published in *The Voice of God to the People of the United States*.⁸⁴⁰ On the eve of his predicted date he held a prayer meeting at a Methodist church where he preached on Jonah and the repentance of the Ninevites in preparation for that fateful day.⁸⁴¹ On a Sunday in May 1796, with the church overflowing with people from nearby congregations, the spectacle ended in disappointment.⁸⁴² When Jesus did not return that day, Austin, like others before him and since, remained undeterred, unapologetic, and convinced that it was just a minor delay. He rebuked the disillusioned, took the vow of a Nazarite, and preached three sermons a day about the impending return of Christ; it is said that crowds followed and many conversions came about through his preaching.⁸⁴³

Austin's response to the Presbyterian commission alarmed by his actions was unequivocal. He wanted the committee and even the whole world to know that he actually did have "uncommon and extraordinary revelations" and he was willing to obey the call, "standing collected and firm" in determination to obey "the voice of Heaven."⁸⁴⁴ In many ways Austin's defense revealed a sharp and engaged religious mind, with language closer to the radical sectarianism of Andrew Croswell, not of a mentally

⁸⁴⁰ Davidson, "Searching for the Millennium," 246. David Austin, *The Voice of God to the People of the United States* (Elizabethtown, NJ: Shepard Kollock, 1796).

⁸⁴¹ Murray, "David Austin," in AAP 2:195-196.

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Ibid., 196.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., 196-197.

unstable person or a religious fanatic.⁸⁴⁵ But after his dismissal from the Presbytery he became increasingly erratic. He returned to his birthplace of New Haven and became engaged in building projects of houses and storage facilities.⁸⁴⁶ When asked about the purpose of the new construction, one account states Austin replied he was preparing for American Jews to store their goods as they assemble in New Haven in preparation to go to Jerusalem to meet the Son of David, with the witness testifying, though not quite sure, that Austin was more likely joking than not.⁸⁴⁷

Austin spent the next few years of his relentless energies on a number of eccentric hobbies, criticizing Congregational ministers he disliked, particularly Timothy Dwight, hyper-politicizing the Federalist/Republican debates with religious zeal, and publishing polemical pamphlets against whichever subject at the moment he deemed worthy of his disdain and acerbic wit.⁸⁴⁸ At a certain point in time he seemed to have regained a measure of sanity.⁸⁴⁹ As one who was formerly trained under Bellamy, once Austin was in his right mind he quickly returned to his teacher's ways—mostly. At a preaching engagement he is reported to have said, “I am the last charge, shot out of the great gun of the Gospel, Dr. Bellamy,” and after making a final point, added, “*That*, I did not get from

⁸⁴⁵ Andrew Crowell's radicalism is covered in Chapter 3. Austin's case is more like James Davenport's retraction of his actions as being akin to temporary insanity.

⁸⁴⁶ Murray, “David Austin,” in AAP 2:198-200.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., 201-206.

⁸⁴⁹ An intimate acquaintance since boyhood was asked if Austin was insane or not, to which he replied, “No more insane than he has been from infancy; he was never like other folks. He was always brilliant, eccentric, and humorous.” See Murray, “David Austin,” in AAP 2:200.

Dr. Bellamy.”⁸⁵⁰ He eventually managed to obtain a position at a Congregational parish in Borzah, CT and reportedly served in humble fashion. Always popular and able to draw a crowd, he seemed to have ended his ministry well.⁸⁵¹

David Austin’s life is more than just a cautionary tale of misplaced obsession or a temporarily unsound mind. It serves as a window into the millennial concerns of the new age. What is particularly interesting is that despite Austin’s eccentricity he was able to obtain followers and convert people even at the height of his, in the words of the committee that dismissed him, “enthusiasm and delusion.”⁸⁵² However many of these prophets of doom have come on the scene, there seems to be no shortage of people willing to believe and follow, the allure of such men and women continue to be a siren song. Austin’s story also sheds light on the dynamics of millennial sectarianism. While Austin’s efforts to establish a “new Church on earth” did not create a movement, it would only be a matter of time before someone with the wherewithal to do so would appear. In this way Austin anticipates many of the sectarian groups that would distinguish themselves with their eschatology, exemplified by William Miller and the Adventist sects of the nineteenth century.⁸⁵³

David Austin was not the only one waiting for the imminent return of the personal reign of Christ during this time. With millennial interest heightened during the decade

⁸⁵⁰ Murray, “David Austin,” in AAP 2:202.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., 206.

⁸⁵² Ibid., 198.

⁸⁵³ For William Miller and the Millerites see David Rowe, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

before the turn of the century, some began to espouse a more precise premillennialist view of the Second Advent of Christ, which aligned more closely to a cataclysmic, imminent return of the real, physical presence of Christ on earth instead of the more gradualist, spiritualist approach latent in most postmillennial works. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, during Edwards's time, the distinctions of when and in what form Christ would return were not attached with additional theological assumptions, usually of a liberal/conservative divide that appeared in the nineteenth century. But with renewed interest in millennialism beginning in the late 1780s, the divergence between the two viewpoints became more prominent.⁸⁵⁴ According to Ruth Bloch there was a development of "self-conscious groups" in accordance with their differing millennial beliefs that organically split into pre- and post- millennial camps.⁸⁵⁵

Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797), a Calvinist Baptist turned Universalist, sounded the premillennialist horn with his *A Course of Lectures on Prophecies That Remained to be Fulfilled*.⁸⁵⁶ First published in London in 1789 and then in New England in 1794-95, Winchester wrote that many expositors of the millennium made the mistake of conflating the thousand-year reign of Christ and the "new heavens and the new earth."⁸⁵⁷ Moreover, Winchester argued that most of the confusion and disagreements about the millennium

⁸⁵⁴ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 121. Bloch estimates that between 1793 and 1796 the number of publications about eschatology in America averaged five to ten times more per year than during the period from 1765 to 1792.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁵⁶ Elhanan Winchester, *A Course of Lectures on Prophecies That Remain to be Fulfilled* (London: R. Hawes, 1789).

⁸⁵⁷ Winchester., *A Course of Lectures on Prophecies*, 11.

was the result of spiritualizing prophetic passages rather than taking them in “their plain obvious sense.”⁸⁵⁸ Again, this populist sentiment was not new. A literal understanding of the thousand-year reign of Christ was popular among post-Reformation groups, especially among English dissenters.⁸⁵⁹ It never went away and quite possibly this was the common understanding of the masses in the colonies. Nevertheless, most works on the millennium in the seventeenth and up to the mid-eighteenth century were ambiguous on distinguishing between the new heavens and new earth, with the latter sounding much like the depictions of the millennium. But the 1780s and 90s reintroduced the exegetical grounds for a literal understanding of biblical eschatology over the spiritualized, hyper-intellectualized interpretations of the millennium.⁸⁶⁰ During the Revolutionary War the radical millennial sects in New England preferred the premillennialist understanding of Christ’s appearing.⁸⁶¹ Moreover, Ruth Bloch identifies eschatological poetry, hymns, and popular literature of the period, while not overtly premillennial, exhibiting depictions of the descent of Christ appearing in the flesh.⁸⁶² For a general audience, the image of a physical Christ coming down was artistically and descriptively preferable and far easier to relate to devotionally than a spiritual one.⁸⁶³

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁵⁹ Jue, “Puritan Millenarianism in Old and New England,” 261-263.

⁸⁶⁰ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 133.

⁸⁶¹ Marini, *Radical Sects*, 46-47.

⁸⁶² Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 133.

⁸⁶³ Ibid.

The premillennialist pushback came mostly from Baptists, Methodists, radical sects, and individual dissenters from the laity.⁸⁶⁴ But ironically, perhaps the most influential premillennialist of this time was Joshua Spalding (1760-1825), a Congregational minister from Salem, MA, a Yale graduate and a former advocate of Hopkinsianism. His *Sentiments, Concerning the Coming and Kingdom of Christ* in 1796 was a direct response to Hopkins's *Treatise on the Millennium*.⁸⁶⁵ After a deep dive into the prophetic passages of scripture he came to denounce the teachings of his former teacher, Hopkins, and wrote a thorough premillennialist apologetic. Ruth Bloch states that out of the stew of premillennial works that came to print around the time, Spalding's was "by far the most complete and systematic of the position."⁸⁶⁶ In the beginning of the work Spalding distinguished between what he called the "ancient doctrine," of "Millenarianism" and those that hold to it, "Millenarians," and "the modern doctrine," with his term, "Millenism" and those that hold to it, "Millenists or modern Millenists."⁸⁶⁷ Spalding cited a scholar of religion for the former definition: "Millenarians, a name given to those who, in primitive ages, believed that the Saints will reign on earth with Jesus Christ a thousand years."⁸⁶⁸ For Spalding, the primitive doctrine of premillennialism was

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁶⁵ Joshua Spalding, *Sentiments, Concerning the Coming and Kingdom of Christ* (Salem, MA: Thomas C. Cushing, 1796).

⁸⁶⁶ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 141.

⁸⁶⁷ Spalding, "Advertisement," in *Sentiments Concerning the Coming and Kingdom of Christ*. First page of the advertisement is unnumbered.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid. The definition is attributed to Hannah Adams, a Unitarian and one of the first female professional religious scholars. Her major work, *A View of Religions*, was originally published in 1784. Adams's work was well-received among Boston's liberal elites. See Hannah Adams, *A View of Religions in*

espoused by an unbroken chain from St. John to current-day prophets like him. To confirm the primitive or “ancient” part of his argument he added a reference from the work of Dr. Nisbet, who observed: “The *Millenarians* build their doctrine on several passages in Scripture, particularly Rev. chap. xx. and it gained ground during the three first centuries.”⁸⁶⁹

Spalding felt that premillennialism, with the belief that God’s wrath would come after a probationary period but before the millennial kingdom, was far more effective in preparing one’s soul for the latter days. In contrast, the “modern doctrine” of postmillennialism held that the millennial kingdom itself would be a probationary time and that judgment would come at its closing. Spalding was sure this teaching was to blame for the modern spiritual malaise of complacency and the desire for worldly comfort. He wrote:

This opinion has constantly prevailed; all hands, learned and unlearned, have been employed to propagate it, and very little has been done, or said, to oppose it; and, for about half a century, it has been the most common belief; consequently, people have laid aside all expectation, that the day of the Lord is nigh; and old and young, ministers and people, have agreed to say, *The Lord delayeth his coming*.⁸⁷⁰

It is difficult to know what to make of Spalding’s claim that “all hands,” both learned and unlearned, old and young, clergy and laity have all been conditioned to

Two Parts (Boston: J.W. Folsom, 1791). Spalding’s inclusion of the research of a liberal Unitarian woman scholar suggests an open, expansive worldview. Ernest Sandeen’s definition of millenarianism in *The Roots of Fundamentalism* follows Adams’s etymology and historiography.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid. The reference is from the work of Dr. Patrick Nisbet who wrote a popular work on church history: *An Abridgement of Ecclesiastical History from the Commencement of Christianity, to the Beginning of the Present Century* (Edinburgh, UK: John Bell, 1776).

⁸⁷⁰ Spalding, *Sentiments Concerning the Coming and Kingdom of Christ*, 45-46.

believe in the modern doctrine of postmillennialism. As covered in the first three chapters on Edwards's apocalyptic thought, there was no single dominant eschatological position at mid-century in the colonies. Between Bellamy's millennial sermon in 1758 and Hopkins's *Treatise on the Millennium* in 1793, the apocalyptic literature was still marked by variance and interpretational fluidity between millennial theories. Spalding may have been overstating things as a polemical device, but as a Congregationalist minister his attack against postmillennial indoctrination must have been effective, especially coming from a former Edwardsean and a student of Hopkins with stellar New Divinity *bona fides*. Even if hyperbole is taken into account, the premise of Spalding's accusation of postmillennialism's ascendancy attests to a certain cultural saturation of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought. Whether or not postmillennialism had gained hegemony by this time is arguable but the more significant factor might be that Spalding believed this to be the case.

In the appendix, Spalding surveyed the history of millennial scholarship and concluded that the early Church Fathers, the Reformers, and the New England Puritan forefathers were all premillennialists. He argued the "modern doctrine" came to the forefront only in the last half-century, with advocates in Daniel Whitby and Moses Lowman influencing Edwards and the New Divinity leaders.⁸⁷¹ Spalding played up the elitist origins of postmillennial thought and highlighted the populist embrace of premillennialism. When the recent great earthquake hit (possibly one of the earthquakes

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 245-273.

from the early 1790s), many Christians were looking, “not for the modern Millennium” but for the “Second Coming of Christ,” noted Spalding wryly.⁸⁷² Spalding’s work was a bold denunciation of an important element of Edwardsean apocalypticism, with its revivalistic framework based on the conversion/redemption dynamic. Not only did Spalding believe that premillennialism was an even greater impetus for revival, but more importantly, it was an even more effective tool for sanctification. Although Spalding was a staunch defender of premillennialism he remained a faithful Congregationalist till the end. Spalding’s work was an inspiration for premillennialists of his generation, but it might have had a greater influence much later when his work was rediscovered by the Millerites in the nineteenth century.⁸⁷³

Why did premillennialists begin to challenge the prevailing narrative of postmillennial thinking of the past half century beginning in the late 1780s and into the turn of the century? Ruth Bloch conjectures that partly there was a populist reaction against the intellectual elitism of New Divinity postmillennialists, which Spalding claimed.⁸⁷⁴ James Davidson notes Spalding was especially concerned about the psychological effects of a metaphorical understanding of the Second Coming, despairing that a lack of sober alertness about the end times would lead to a decreased motivation for holy affections.⁸⁷⁵ When recalling the account of the recent earthquake Spalding relayed

⁸⁷² Ibid., 253.

⁸⁷³ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 143. Joshua V. Himes, William Miller’s close confidant and publicist, reprinted Spalding’s *Sentiments* in 1841.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁵ Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 274.

how many “arose and trimmed their lamps” in expectation of Christ’s coming and that “many Christians were then in an exercise of faith,” with one example of “a reverend and godly Mr. P___, who, awaking from sleep, said to his consort, ‘My dear, the Lord is come, let us arise and go forth to meet him.’”⁸⁷⁶ It was the teaching of the physical coming of Christ, Spalding argued, not the abstract spiritualized Christ of the philosophers, that met the population’s given realities. This strain of evangelical populism and anti-intellectualism (against elitist liberal education) gained momentum during the Second Great Awakening and continued on in the antebellum period of the Civil War and even afterward, well into the early decades of the twentieth century. It remains a core feature of modern-day premillennialist fundamentalism.⁸⁷⁷

The beginnings of New Divinity theology, however, was anything but elitist. As Joseph Conforti’s analysis of New Divinity ministers has shown, most of the young men were from rural towns and villages of humble means and lower social status, hence the patronizing moniker, “Farmer Metaphysicians.”⁸⁷⁸ While this does not preclude intellectualism, nonetheless it does put into question some of the assumptions about the social dimensions of the pre and post-millennial debates. More than intellectual background or social standing, a more convincing reason for the premillennial

⁸⁷⁶ Spalding, *Sentiments Concerning the Coming and Kingdom of Christ*, 253.

⁸⁷⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 7. Marsden clarifies the anti-intellectualism of fundamentalism as not against science or knowledge, but rather an embrace of the marriage of Baconian ideals of facts and observation and the tradition of “Scottish Common Sense Realism” over against the intellectual traditions of secular liberalism.

⁸⁷⁸ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 11.

rediscovery in the 1790s was that it was part of an overall resurgence of biblical exegesis, which was itself a part of a larger picture of rapid advancements in knowledge acquisition, including improvements in printing technology, research methodologies, and greater access to published material. These advancements were incremental but greatly increased after the First Great Awakening. In the 1750s, the many theological battles over the nature of revivalism, original sin, Universalism, Arminianism, antinomianism, deism, and other topics occupied a theologian like Edwards. Then came the Revolutionary period where these debates took a back seat to political battles and the considerations of the fledgling republic. Once the new nation was established all these knowledge advancements reached critical mass, with a growing middle-class laity ready to devour available information. The timing was right for a proliferation of knowledge and along with it came the populist compulsion to take a fresh look at the scriptures. It was a time of broadening horizons, where a poor, bookish, sickly woman like Hannah Adams could, through diligent study, become a well-respected researcher and scholar.⁸⁷⁹

On both sides of the pre/post millennial debate, the underlying commitment was on getting the interpretation of scripture right. New Divinity leaders did not spiritualize the millennium because of their intellectual snobbery, they were doing so on account of their logical reasoning in keeping with their scriptural exegesis. Premillennialists took up the challenge to put in the work like their postmillennial counterparts and in doing so they rediscovered the premillennialist foundations of the past. Anti-establishment sects

⁸⁷⁹ See note above on Hannah Adams.

tended embraced the Reformation motto of *ad fontes*, back to the sources. Reformers and revivalists looked to the first-century church or the early church fathers for inspiration, or what the Continental Pietists referred to as Primitive Christianity. As a young man John Wesley was even called “Primitive Christianity,” a nickname given to him by an acquaintance.⁸⁸⁰

Spalding had tapped into this fount by emphasizing that premillennialism was actually an “ancient doctrine” and he was just putting old wine that seemed new into new wineskins. In essence Spalding was rejecting the Augustinian tradition of an allegorized scriptural interpretation and instead embracing the Primitivism of the early church.⁸⁸¹ Furthermore, he sought to link this tradition with the Puritan forefathers, such as Cotton Mather and Thomas Prince Jr.⁸⁸² Spalding’s hearkening back to the ancient primitive church would anticipate the millennial Restorationist movements a half century later. In the 1790s, however, the pre/post-millennial divide was still relegated to a small niche of millennial expositors. Where both sides of the debate were in agreement was that the new nation needed an infusion of renewed spirituality. In their millennialism, Spalding, as well as Edwards and his New Divinity heirs, were far more interested in fostering a sense of, in Edwardsean term, “vital religion” than in any minutiae of millennial debate.⁸⁸³

⁸⁸⁰ Cited by Frank Baker, introduction to *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed., John Stacey (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 2. In a letter by Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 4 April 1730: ‘I honour Primitive Christianity, and desire you will let him know as much’ (Wesley, *Letters*, Oxford edition, 25:256n2). The “Primitive Christianity” she refers to is John Wesley.

⁸⁸¹ Spalding, *Sentiments Concerning the Coming and Kingdom of Christ*, 245, 253.

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, 233, 260.

⁸⁸³ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 175.

Second Generation Edwardseans and the Revolution

When news of the beginning of the French Revolution reached America in 1789, both Bellamy and Hopkins were old men in the twilight of their ministries. They had spent their lives as both regional ministers and public figures. They spent much of their energies in passing on a legacy of Edwardsean theology and piety to a new generation of New Divinity church leaders. The great challenge for this next generation was to implement Edwardsean New Divinity teaching in a confusing time of change amidst a turbulent political climate. While there have been studies that allude to the non-heterogeneity of the New Divinity movement, pointing to divergences between the two streams flowing from Bellamy and Hopkins, to the theological differences between generations or disagreements in points of emphases, what the examples of David Austin and Joshua Spalding reveal is that they were actually outliers.⁸⁸⁴ As with any large religious movement there was not complete uniformity, but internecine rebellion was rare. New Divinity adherents were, by in large, a unified body. The second generation included many influential New England ministers who were instrumental in shaping the New Divinity movement of evangelical Calvinism in New England, and by extension, the religious identity of the nation as a whole at an important moment in its young history: Nathan Strong Sr. (1717-1795), John Smalley (1734-1820), Stephen West (1735-1818), Levi Hart (1736-1808), Ephraim Judson (1737-1813), Samuel Mills Sr. (1743-1833),

⁸⁸⁴ Goen, "Jonathan Edwards, A New Departure in Eschatology," 38. J.A. de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea*, 205-207. See also, Charles Keller, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1942), 33.

Jonathan Edwards Jr. (1745-1801), Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840), and Charles Backus (1749-1803).⁸⁸⁵

New Divinity homogeneity did not mean there was wholesale agreement or no attempts at clarifications or reformulations. Just as Bellamy and Hopkins appropriated Edwards's theology to work toward creative solutions to counter false religion and promote vital piety, the second generation of New Divinity leaders looked to define Consistent Calvinism in relation to their times. Nathanael Emmons stands out among the second generation as the figure who pushed the boundaries of New Divinity thought while remaining faithful to its ethos, ethics, and eschatology. After graduating from Yale, Emmons, without much pedigree and in poverty, went to study under New Divinity stalwarts, Nathan Strong Sr. and John Smalley.⁸⁸⁶ As a young man Emmons went through a series of spiritual anxieties not unlike a young Edwards. In college Emmons was inclined to Arminianism until he read Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*, which turned him to Calvinism. But with an unsettled mind Emmons sought out the likes of Strong and Smalley, the latter described as a well-qualified instructor "who had thoroughly digested Mr. Edwards' writings," having trained under Bellamy.⁸⁸⁷ Like Edwards, Emmons had strongly revolted against the notion of divine sovereignty but at a certain point he

⁸⁸⁵ These are generalizations of generations, as figures like Charles Backus and Nathanael Emmons can technically be considered third generation. But I have grouped the second generation as those born before 1750.

⁸⁸⁶ Nathanael Emmons, "Memoir," in *The Works of Nathanael Emmons with a Memoir of His Life*, vol. 1, ed. Jacob Ide (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1842), x-xi. Emmons's *Works* heretofore referred as WNE, followed by volume and page number.

⁸⁸⁷Emmons, "Memoir" in WNE 1:xiii.

confessed he felt, “A deep sense of my total depravity of heart, and of the sovereignty of God in having mercy on whom he will have mercy, destroyed my dependence on men and means,” and it was only when his hopes were gone that one day he “had a peculiar discovery of the divine perfections, and of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, which was followed by a “peculiar spirit of benevolence to all my fellow men, whether friends or foes.”⁸⁸⁸

Emmons’s personal testimony of conversion followed a familiar script of Edwardsean New Divinity language, with terms like “total depravity,” “sovereignty of God,” and the heart being warmed to the “benevolence” to fellow men. After marking his conversion experience and before being settled at the second church in Wrentham, MA, Emmons went through a difficult examination council where several of the older ministers questioned his orthodoxy.⁸⁸⁹ Although Emmons finally passed after several contentious meetings, it was a harbinger of the fiercely independent path he would take in his life and ministry. As he recalled, “It made me examine my religious sentiments with more attention, and inspired me with more zeal to propagate and defend them against all opposition.”⁸⁹⁰ As a young man in his thirties during the period of American Independence, the concept of “Revolution” became a recurring theme in Emmons’s life and work. Toward the end of his long life in ministry Emmons took time to offer some of his reflections on millennial themes in an annual Thanksgiving sermon given on

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., xii.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., xii-xiii.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid., xiv.

December 2, 1819 titled, “Revolution and Reformation.” Taking Ezekiel 21:27 as its text with the revolutionary phrase: “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it,” Emmons set about to show how “God will bring about the glorious reign of Christ, by overturning all things that stand in the way of it.”⁸⁹¹ Emmons began by stating that “every species of tyranny stands in the way of the glorious reign of Christ,” noting both the civil tyrannies of Mohammedism, paganism, and even some Christian nations as well as the ecclesiastical tyrannies of the church, which has been “carried to a greater height than any civil tyranny ever has been.”⁸⁹²

Emmons followed the usual Protestant line of attacking the Catholic Church but in this sermon he offered a measured take on how it came to corruption. It began with sincere intentions, Emmons wrote, but was marred by unwise decisions as “Christians early formed larger and larger unions, in order to give them more courage and strength to oppose the enemies of Christ, and in that way to promote his cause; and persisted in such measures till they were all united under one bishop or universal head, whom they styled their father, or pope.”⁸⁹³ Over time this “self-created” institution would become the source of the “greatest evils” to the church universal. Emmons’s relatively sympathetic reading of the origins of the Catholic Church may have been motivated by his intention to use this history to actually warn against the current ecumenical spirit of his time, writing: “And same thing is happening, forming plans to bring about the same unscriptural and

⁸⁹¹ Emmons, “Revolution and Reformation,” in WNE 2:302.

⁸⁹² Ibid.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., 310.

unwise union in all the churches in New England.”⁸⁹⁴ Emmons was referring to a number of initiatives to form “larger and larger unions” of churches, and specifically the Plan of Union in 1801 that sought to unite the denominations of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Emmons had a radical spirit of individualism and a hermeneutics of relying on the common-sense understanding of the Bible without the baggage of tradition or a herd mentality.⁸⁹⁵ Emmons disdained these human-centered efforts, writing, “And they are professedly doing it to promote the spread of the gospel, and the prosperity and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ. This makes me say, that Christians should not lean to their own understanding in adopting measures to hasten the latter-day glory of the church.”⁸⁹⁶

God’s overturning of tyranny, idolatry, infidelity, and heresy, for six thousand years was the thrust of redemptive history.⁸⁹⁷ Emmons accepted the common Puritan eschatological timing espoused by Edwards and his first generation disciples of seeing the millennial reign in the seventh thousand year of history and of placing its commencement sometime after the year 2000:

It has been the general opinion of the most learned and judicious divines, that the millennium will not commence until the year two thousand. As there were two thousand years before the law, and two thousand years under the law, so they have supposed, that there would be two thousand years under the gospel, before the millennium would commence; and that

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁵ Gerald R. McDermott, “Nathanael Emmons and the Decline of Edwardsian Theology,” in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 125-126.

⁸⁹⁶ “Revolution and Reformation,” in WNE 2:310.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 305, 307.

the seventh thousand years would be the thousand years of the millennium. And if we may judge according to the analogy of providence, and the present state of the world, we have no great reason to think that this opinion is far from the truth.⁸⁹⁸

Eschewing speculative matters on the nature of the millennium Emmons wrote: “Without indulging a vain imagination respecting ten thousand things, which may, or may not, take place in that glorious day, we may know, that the world will be far more happy then than it ever has been before.”⁸⁹⁹ But for Emmons, happiness was not holiness. Imperfect humans could not bear perfect prosperity, therefore Emmons noted, “All men both good and bad appear greatly pleased with the prospect of a thousand happy years; but all the unholy will be as much disappointed at Christ's coming in his glorious kingdom, as the Jews were at his coming in the flesh.”⁹⁰⁰

On the one hand Emmons believed that human beings were too unwise to try to hasten the coming of the Kingdom. But on the other hand Emmons strongly believed in the innate ability of humans to choose between right and wrong, to the point of rejecting Edward's arguments in *Freedom of the Will*.⁹⁰¹ He also felt that Edwards's definition of holiness as a habit or disposition was too abstract, instead he preferred to call it “benevolent exercises” or exercises of the will.⁹⁰² Faith and repentance too, were virtuous

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., 308.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 309.

⁹⁰¹ McDermott, “Nathanael Emmons,” 120.

⁹⁰² Ibid., 121.

and holy exercises.⁹⁰³ Like Bellamy and Hopkins, Emmons thought that greater trials and tribulations will meet the church. It was up to the vigorous people of faith to stand against the opposition. He wrote:

If God will remove the obstacles which still lie in the way of the latter-day glory of Christ in the manner that has been mentioned, then good men have a great deal to do, to promote this great and good design. Their work will probably become more and more difficult and dangerous, as the event draws nearer and nearer. For as the nature of it will be better and better understood, opposition to it will become stronger and stronger.⁹⁰⁴

Full of patriotic fervor, Emmons, in a sermon in 1786, “Dignity of Man,” saw that it was up to forceful men to take the kingdom by force, just as St. Paul had established Christianity in the heathen world, Luther brought revolution in the church, Newton and Locke expanded the boundaries of human knowledge, Franklin and Washington brought independence and peace to America.⁹⁰⁵ For Emmons, Christians of his generation faced greater challenges than all these great men. He continued:

But greater things than these remain to be done. The kingdom of antichrist is to be destroyed, the Mohammedans are to be subdued, the Jews are to be restored, the barbarous nations are to be civilized, the gospel is to be preached to all nations, and the whole face of things in this world is to be beautifully and gloriously changed. These things are to be done by the instrumentality of man.⁹⁰⁶

Quite possibly more so than any of the second generation of New Divinity leaders, Emmons employed strong apocalyptic language to convey his eschatology. He

⁹⁰³ “Good Men Without Merit,” in WNE 2:194.

⁹⁰⁴ “Revolution and Reformation,” in WNE 2:309.

⁹⁰⁵ “Dignity of Man,” in WNE 2:29

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

believed the defeat of the Muslims would require a war of desolation that would engulf all of Europe and possibly even America. The entrance of the Jews into the millennium would mirror their conquest of Canaan by the force of arms. As the Reformation brought upon long and bloody wars or religion, Emmons thought God would continue to use the means of wars and revolutions to bring forceful change. In this sense Emmons had more in kind with the apocalyptic premillennialists of a later generation than with the guarded, afflictive postmillennialism of Edwards, Bellamy, and Hopkins. Warned Emmons:

Though some suppose the Millennium has already commenced, and will soon be peaceably ushered in, yet their opinion does not appear to be well founded upon anything God has said in his word, or has done in his providence. Wars and rumors of wars are still sounding in our ears; and in respect to those nations in particular, who will probably destroy one another to prepare the way for the restoration of the Jews. It concerns the friends of God to prepare for the fiery trials that may await them.⁹⁰⁷

Emmons brought this point home in another sermon titled “Changes and Revolutions, Wisely Adapted to Our Present State,” where he made a curiously suspect observation that civilizations such as China, since they have not undergone external revolutions and convulsions, “have made little progress in knowledge, in virtue, or happiness.”⁹⁰⁸ Similar to the language David Austin used about needing to undergo a revolution of the heart, Emmons contended that “the hearts of men must be greatly altered before they can enjoy a fixed and peaceable state. And therefore till the millennium takes place, revolutions will be necessary and beneficial.”⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁷ “The Conversion of the Jews,” in WNE 6:310.

⁹⁰⁸ “Changes and Revolutions, Wisely Adapted to Our Present State,” in WNE 7:237.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

If Emmons expressed views that seemed contradictory it was because he held, perhaps quite intentionally, two opposing views in constant tension—divine efficiency and human agency.⁹¹⁰ Emmons thought God’s efficiency was the animating source of all that had occurred over time, even explaining theodicy as God being the “efficient cause of sin.”⁹¹¹ Yet he maintained God gave humans the rational power to make personal judgments on religious matters.⁹¹² Emmons’s individualism made his Republican leanings rare among New Divinity leaders, most of whom were Federalists. But as Mark Noll points out, Republicanism and religion were not a natural fit, as freedom of the individual soul would constantly come in conflict with church discipline.⁹¹³ When the sacred canopy of Puritan covenant theology was punctured religion became vulnerable to diffraction.⁹¹⁴ The varieties of eschatological speculation reflected this ever-widening factionalism. But if there was a uniting force among evangelical Calvinists, it was the emphasis on a strong Edwardsean revivalist tradition that gave central place to the revolution of the heart. Thus the various New Divinity teachings were contained under the umbrella of Edward’s redemptive history. The Second Great Awakening would fortify this tradition, while also posing the upcoming challenges of adjudicating between

⁹¹⁰ McDermott, “Nathanael Emmons,” 120n21.

⁹¹¹ Ibid.

⁹¹² Ibid., 125.

⁹¹³ Noll, *America’s God*, 55.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid.

a human-centered theological anthropology and a God-centered anthropological ecclesiology.

New Divinity and the Second Great Awakening

As mentioned in Chapter Four, a number of influential historians have portrayed Bellamy, Hopkins and the older generation of New Divinity teachers as being primarily theological metaphysicians whose doctrinal refinements put a metaphorical wall between their adherents and Edwardsean piety.⁹¹⁵ Joseph Conforti notes that these historians claim New Divinity men “committed metaphysical suicide in an age of vital piety.”⁹¹⁶ Conforti is right to point out that the dynamic ministries of these second generation ministers challenge such assumptions.⁹¹⁷ Were it true that New Divinity preachers conveyed a dry, theological message without spiritual resonance one would expect to see a decline in numbers and influence. On the contrary the opposite occurred. New Divinity preachers of the second generation were the primary catalysts of revivals beginning in the late 1780s.⁹¹⁸ From New Hampshire to Western and Central Massachusetts, to agrarian towns like Rowley, Byfield, Medway, and Franklin, revivals swept through the areas dominated

⁹¹⁵ See Sidney Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 96. Stephen Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy: Timothy Dwight and the Origins of American Evangelical Orthodoxy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1974), 54-55.

⁹¹⁶ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 175.

⁹¹⁷ Joseph Conforti’s work restores the reputation of New Divinity leaders as being much more than metaphysicians. David Kling largely supports this revision. See Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 24.

⁹¹⁸ Even more conceptually heterogeneous than the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening is usually dated from the early New Divinity revivals in the late 1780s, reaching its peak in the 1820s-30s, then waning by 1840. Diversification had led to specifying different revivals, such as Baptist, Methodist, Southern, Finney, etc. In this study, the New England, New Divinity-led revivals will be highlighted.

by New Divinity clergy.⁹¹⁹ Although Baptist and Methodists were rapidly making inroads in New England, New York, and the western frontiers, due to the efforts of these New Divinity leaders, Congregationalists led the initial phase of the Second Great Awakening.

Although the first rumblings of the earliest New England revivals predate the French Revolution, as violence and bloodshed increased in France, the leaders of the New Divinity preached that if America wished to avoid a similar fate of God's wrath they would have to repent and turn from infidelity.⁹²⁰ This instigated the rapid spread of revivals from one region of New England to another. If New Divinity ministers were guilty of hyper-intellectualized metaphysics, they were aware that revival preaching was an entirely different realm. Because they occupied parishes in the outskirts New Divinity preachers aimed to convict the heart more than imprint the head.⁹²¹ In an unpublished manuscript, "Miscellaneous Observations on Preaching," the younger Edwards urged New Divinity ministers to "avoid an argumentative strain of preaching" and advised his students to rely rather on preaching with "zeal and devotion."⁹²² Joseph Bellamy and Nathanael Emmons, two of the most prolific teachers of the New Divinity school, trained prospective preachers to follow the elder Edwards's style of preaching by avoiding metaphysics and making the sermon understandable to everyone.⁹²³

⁹¹⁹ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 178.

⁹²⁰ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 1.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹²² Quoted in Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 177. Undated MSS at Andover-Newton Theological School Library.

⁹²³ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 177.

During the early phase of the Awakening Bellamy was invited to preach at his former students' congregations throughout Connecticut.⁹²⁴ In response to the growing excitement of revival, *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, a monthly newsletter, was established in 1800 to document the movement of the spirit. The editorial team was a *Who's Who* of New Divinity ministers. By the end of that year Congregational churches in Connecticut, most of them led by New Divinity preachers, admitted over seventeen hundred people for church membership.⁹²⁵ After nearly a decade of ongoing revivals Hopkins wrote to a correspondent in England: "A remarkable revival of religion has lately taken place in New England and part of New York state...it is said in more than 100 towns, mostly if not wholly under the preachers of Edwardean divinity."⁹²⁶ In the same correspondence he wrote: "Edwardean sentiments are spreading among divines and others in New England...and bid well to take the lead in divinity and silence all opposition."⁹²⁷ The letter attests to Hopkins's self-conscious identity as one of the prime promoters of Edwardsean revivalism.

The main opposition to New Divinity Edwardsean revivalism came not from the Baptists or Methodists but from moderate Calvinists. The Old Lights who had criticized Edwards and the earlier New England revivals for "enthusiasm" had joined forces with

⁹²⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁹²⁵ Ibid, 17.

⁹²⁶ Hopkins to John Ryland, Oct. 17, 1799. Hopkins Papers, Andover-Newton Theological Library. Quoted in Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 179,

⁹²⁷ Ibid., 183.

some disaffected former New Lights, which evolved into a coalition that came to be called Old Calvinists.⁹²⁸ Their center of power was in Boston and in the corporations of Harvard and Yale.⁹²⁹ They had retained from their predecessors the epistemological foundation of reason being the guiding light of faith while being much more open to the idea of human ability and the progress of history. They served as mainly a reactionary force occupying the middle space between liberals and the New Divinity during the early period of the Second Great Awakening.⁹³⁰ For New Divinity clergy, they still viewed history as providential, but with an emphasis on God's work of redemption, meaning that however history was unfolding it was occasion for a call to repentance and revival. Hopkins, who understood Edwards's evangelical basis for his apocalypticism better than anyone, had surmised they were in the time of the sixth vial and that great tribulations were still ahead.

Many of New Divinity's second generation took up Hopkins's clarion call of revivalistic urgency. Perhaps with an eye toward theological opposition in mind, Charles Backus, a stalwart second generation New Divinity leader, preached the afflictive model of redemption in 1791: "An acquaintance with human nature, and the history of the church, will not permit us to look for the accomplishment of Zion's hopes, without great

⁹²⁸ William Breitenbach, "The Consistent Calvinism of the New Divinity Movement," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (April 1984): 241.

⁹²⁹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 403-404.

⁹³⁰ Breitenbach, "The Consistent Calvinism of the New Divinity Movement," 242. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 403-404. Ahlstrom identifies influential figures such as Jedidiah Morse, David Tappan, Joseph Willard, Thomas Clap, Isaac Stiles, and son, Ezra Stiles being in the Old Calvinist camp.

convulsions in the kingdoms of the world. Great abuses of reason and the passions in matters of religion are also to be expected, before Jerusalem shall become the joy of the whole earth.”⁹³¹ It was probably not lost on Backus that he was preaching this message nearly fifty years after the peak of the First Great Awakening. Since that time they had fought a hard long road to where they were now and after a dead period of spiritual declension they seemed to be coming upon events conducive to revival.⁹³² New Divinity leaders of the second generation had waited in anticipation for this moment; they felt they were at the precipice of another awakening. Richard Shiels argues that New Divinity clergymen “created the myth of the second great awakening” in that they spoke of the inauguration of another age of revival even before it became a historical reality.⁹³³ Joseph Conforti even triangulates a praying meeting of New Divinity ministers in January 1795, in the spirit of Edwards’s concert of prayer, as the particular event where they consciously began to invent not only the awakening of their own time, but memorialized and reified the earlier Edwardsean revival by providing all the necessary elements—social memory, cultural authority, and sacred texts—to create the myth of the First Great Awakening.⁹³⁴ It can be said this historical moment gave birth to both awakenings.

⁹³¹ Charles Backus, *The Faithful Ministers of Jesus Christ Rewarded: A Sermon, Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Azel Backus* (Litchfield, CT: Collier and Buel, 1792), 12. Quoted in Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 60-61.

⁹³² Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 60.

⁹³³ Richard Shiels, “The Connecticut Clergy in the Second Great Awakening” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1976), chap 1.

⁹³⁴ Joseph Conforti, “The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795-1842,” *Early American Literature* 26, no. 2 (1991): 100-101.

An important historical question was whether the Second Great Awakening was a socially-constructed invention of historically-conscious revivalists or an organic manifestation of the social and religious forces that coalesced during a spiritually active period. A similar eschatological question for both Edwards in the First Great Awakening and Hopkins and other New Divinity leaders in the Second was whether the coming kingdom would take a supernatural work of God or whether it could be obtained by human means. Both Edwards and Hopkins chose to error on the side of the supernatural. However, the second generation of New Divinity leaders, perhaps due to the self-conscious linking of the First and Second Great Awakening, seemed to have veered from this blueprint.

The first decade of the Second Great Awakening in New England was a dynamic interplay between self-conscious ministers who were intent on connecting the two periods of revivals, with a laity ready and better prepared to respond to an institutionalized revivalism. What the stories of David Austin and Nathanael Emmons show is a clear direction toward greater individualization and a pattern of greater populism in religious matters in the lead up to the Second Great Awakening. This created a dynamic of individualization and institutionalization that unwittingly undermined the hallmark of Edwardsean revivalism, that is, the supernatural and surprising work of God. Although by the 1820s New England evangelical Calvinists were rapidly losing ground to Baptists and Methodists in fomenting revivals, New Divinity influence would go beyond New England by providing an expansive millennial vision for America as a whole.

Timothy Dwight and America's Millennial Manifest Destiny

The person who figures most prominently during the first two decades of New Divinity's struggle to strike a right balance between human effort and letting the spirit take the lead on the revivals was Edwards's grandson, Timothy Dwight (1752-1817). Timothy Dwight was born in 1752 in Northampton. His mother, Mary, was the only one in the Edwards family to remain in Northampton after her father's dismissal. Dwight's father was the son of Colonel Timothy Dwight, Edwards's long-time friend and supporter in Northampton. Like Edwards, Dwight entered Yale at age thirteen, the youngest member of the class of 1769.⁹³⁵ Dwight and fellow classmate Nathan Strong Jr. (1748-1816), a future influential New Divinity minister, finished tied for the role of valedictorian.⁹³⁶ Dwight became a tutor of the college and in his prodigious efforts to become a man of letters he allowed his eyes and health to fail. Being in a humbled state of illness may have contributed to his decision to join Yale's College Church in January 1774.⁹³⁷ From Edwards's journals and his personal account we know great details of his personal struggles over his conversion. Unfortunately having left no such documents, we do not know much of Dwight's conversion. But during the presidency of Thomas Clap, a moderate Calvinist, it was a prerequisite to mark a conversion experience for membership

⁹³⁵ John Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 29. Much of the biographical information will be from this work.

⁹³⁶ Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator.*, 30.

⁹³⁷ Charles E. Cunningham, *Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817, A Biography* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1942), 49.

in the College Church.⁹³⁸ We can therefore surmise that having undergone a crisis of health Dwight was able to work through a crisis of faith by making a public profession of his salvation.

After weathering the political and social uncertainties of the 1770s and 80s, there was understandably a reason for optimism for America as an emerging republic. While a tutor at Yale, Dwight and other budding poets started a group, calling themselves the Wicked Wits, later known as the Connecticut Wits, which included future luminaries, John Turnbull (1750-1831) Joel Barlow (1754-1812), and Noah Webster (1758-1843).⁹³⁹ Dwight became a popular tutor as undergraduates clamored to study the sophisticated literature of the *belle lettres* with him. The themes these young poets wrote about provide insights into the spiritual *zeitgeist*. Joel Barlow wrote in the footnotes of his popular epic poem *The Vision of Columbus*:

...the Author is happy to find that his general ideas, respecting the future progress and final perfection of human society, are supported by those of so respectable a Character as Dr. Price. In his Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, he remarks... 'lead us to expect that a more improved and happy state of human affairs will take place before the final consummation of all things. The world has been hitherto gradually improving; light and knowledge have been gaining ground, and human life at present, compared with what it once was, is much the same that a youth approaching to manhood is, compared with an infant.'"⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁸ Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 33.

⁹³⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

⁹⁴⁰ Joel Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; a Poem in Nine Books* (Harford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1787), 241n., 242n.

Dr. Price was the estimable British moral philosopher, Richard Price (1723-1791), who was celebrated by the colonists for his defense of American independence. Barlow's poem expressed a growing confidence in human progress, not only as an inevitable course of the advancement of society, but as a means to the millennium. Ruth Bloch comments that in the poem, the "spirit of commerce" was, for Barlow, the path forward to "millennial happiness."⁹⁴¹ Barlow went on to express further: "It has long been the opinion of the Author, that such a state of peace and happiness as is foretold in Scripture and commonly called the millennial period, may be rationally expected to be introduced without a miracle."⁹⁴²

This human-centered optimism was not without support within New Divinity thought. But what Bellamy and others had only insinuated in their writings on the millennium, Barlow was able to declare boldly—there would be no need for the supernatural intervention of God. For the generational cohort Barlow represented, the gradual march of Providence would be led by enlightened poets and the prophets of reason. Later on in the footnote Barlow acknowledged that although he initially wrote cautiously as a youth, corroboration by others had emboldened him of his optimistic conclusions. America was coming out of its infancy and barreling into "manhood" and into the Enlightened world of the nineteenth century. Such robust millennial confidence in America was prevalent. Paul Kafer identifies John Adams's *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765), John Trumbull's Master's oration at Yale in 1770, and Philip

⁹⁴¹ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 97.

⁹⁴² Barlow, *Vision of Columbus*, 242n.

Freneau and H.H. Brackenridge's *The Rising Glory of America* at the graduation exercise at Princeton in 1771 as some of the forerunners of Barlow's millennial poem.⁹⁴³

One of Dwight's earliest poems to circulate at Yale in manuscript form (around 1771) was, "America: Or, a Poem on the Settlement of the British Colonies." The unassuming title belies its ambitious language. According to Kenneth Silverman, in this work Dwight was imitating the paeans of the English poet, Alexander Pope (1688-1744).⁹⁴⁴ But instead of kings and other prominent English history-makers as the main subjects, Dwight substituted God as the "nation-builder," who would author the story of America.⁹⁴⁵ Moreover, Dwight used the millennium as the force upon which America would fulfill its larger destiny, where "savage nations at thy scepter bend."⁹⁴⁶ Kenneth Silverman notes with a hint of sarcasm, "in this way Dwight made God and the millennium fill out the thin promise of his culture."⁹⁴⁷ While "America" was a poem about the past, Dwight started work on an epic biblical poem, *The Conquest of Canaan* in 1771 that spoke of America's future.⁹⁴⁸ It took four years to complete the first draft and

⁹⁴³ Peter Kafer, "The Making of Timothy Dwight: A Connecticut Morality Tale," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (April 1990): 197-198. See also Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 84. Bloch identifies many more works of the period, while not containing direct biblical references, expressing sentiments of millennial hope and optimism.

⁹⁴⁴ Kenneth Silverman, *Timothy Dwight* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 23.

⁹⁴⁵ Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 23.

⁹⁴⁶ Timothy Dwight, *America: or, A Poem on the Settlement of the British Colonies; Addressed to the Friends of Freedom, and Their Country* (New Haven, CT: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1780), 11. Quoted in Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 23.

⁹⁴⁷ Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 23.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40. Timothy Dwight, *The Conquest of Canaan: a Poem, in Eleven Books* (Hartford, CT: Elisha Babcock, 1785).

was eventually published in 1785 after the Revolution.⁹⁴⁹ The poem, with the biblical Joshua as its main protagonist, was an allegory of sorts of America, although Dwight took pains to deny any allegorical intent.⁹⁵⁰ Dwight, who served as a chaplain during the war, dedicated the work to George Washington, but went out of his way to deny the general's association with the Joshua of his poem though the public evidently saw the parallels.⁹⁵¹ Underlying the biblical representation of battles and conquest in verse, Dwight unveiled a language of muscular spirituality, a call-to-arms to a spiritual battle against a yet unknown enemy. It used warfare as a way to conjure up millennial imagery.⁹⁵²

During the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, Dwight was a typical Whig who supported the cause of defending America against tyranny. Reflecting upon this time in his later years in *Travels in New England and New York*, Dwight highlighted how he was an early supporter for independence.⁹⁵³ On July 25, 1776, Dwight delivered a "Valedictory Address" at Yale where he sought to expand the horizons of his fellow graduates by declaring:

You should by no means consider yourselves as members of a small neighbourhood, town or colony only, but as being concerned in laying the

⁹⁴⁹ Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 24.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., 30. See also Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 39. In response to a critique of the poem and of its allegorical nature Dwight wrote, "That General Washington should resemble Joshua is not strange...The truth is, the poem was begun in 1771 and written out several times before the year 1775, all the essential parts were finished before the war begun."

⁹⁵¹ Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 31-32.

⁹⁵² Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 39.

⁹⁵³ Kafer, "The Making of Timothy Dwight," 193.

foundations of American greatness. Your wishes, your designs, your labors are not to be confined by the narrow bounds of the present age, but are to comprehend succeeding generations, and be pointed to immortality. You are to act, not like inhabitants of a village, nor like beings of an hour, but like citizens of a world, and like candidates for a name that shall survive the conflagration.⁹⁵⁴

As a twenty-four-year-old young man Dwight marshalled the rhetoric of potentiality for America's future, courting the young to live not only for their current generation but for generations to come—with an eye toward “immortality.” Seeing history in providential terms was nothing new to colonial America. But what the Puritan forbearers and even his grandfather Edwards could not have portended was America as an independent nation divorced from the baggage of Old World England. Dwight marveled at the timing of the birth of America when the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment were in full effect.⁹⁵⁵ The nation was predestined to be more than a secular Enlightenment ideal. Its success would signal the coming of the millennial age, the place where “the progress of temporal things towards perfection will undoubtedly be finished.”⁹⁵⁶

The nation's spiritual destiny as the final and most glorious empire was prophesized and made manifest. It fit the narrative of the worldwide drama where America would take center stage in ushering in the millennium. This heliotropism, the idea of the world's empires following the sun's natural movement from east to west, was

⁹⁵⁴ Timothy Dwight, *A Valedictory Address to the Young Gentlemen Who Commenced Bachelors of Arts, July 25th 1776* (New Haven, CT: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1776), 15-16.

⁹⁵⁵ Richard Gamble, “‘The Last and Brightest Empire of Time’: Timothy Dwight as Voegelin's ‘Authoritative Present,’ 1771-1787,” *Humanitas* 20, nos. 1 and 2 (2007): 22, <https://css.cua.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/richard-m-gamble-the-last-and-brightest-empire-of-time.pdf>.

⁹⁵⁶ Dwight., *Valedictory Address*, 37.

not lost on the young Dwight.⁹⁵⁷ The suggestion that the millennial age would begin in America had embroiled his grandfather in a polemical battle. Dwight was surely aware of the controversies surrounding Edwards's *Some Thoughts*. Yet, a generation later Dwight was ready to "proceed one step further" than his grandfather by declaring that America is "emphatically that uttermost part of the earth, whose songs and happiness so often inspired Isaiah with raptures."⁹⁵⁸ Dwight was literally equating the prophecy in Isaiah to be a direct reference to America. Dwight's valedictory address was both overly dramatic and overtly humanistic. According to Stephen Berk, for young Dwight, America was "both Eden and a latter-day Zion."⁹⁵⁹ The progress toward perfection was attainable by God's providence, but also within the advances made by human ingenuity. Dwight retorted: "Need I remind you that it is a peculiar mark of the millennian [*sic*] period, that human life shall be lengthened, and that the child shall die an hundred years old?"⁹⁶⁰ Dwight extolled the virtues of learning and the sciences. Even in the millennium it would be advances in botany that would result in longer lifespans, not the supernatural means of grace.

After serving as a chaplain during the war Dwight returned to Northampton to attend to family matters, including settling affairs related to the passing of his father. Although his father was a prominent soldier, businessman, and a pillar of the community,

⁹⁵⁷ Gamble, "Last and Brightest," 24.

⁹⁵⁸ Dwight, *Valedictory Address*, 14.

⁹⁵⁹ Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy*, 21.

⁹⁶⁰ Dwight, *Valedictory Address*, 18.

he had stood on the wrong side of the war and for that Dwight had to make amends.⁹⁶¹ In part he restored the family's reputation through sheer hard work, starting a grammar school and serving in the state assembly. During these historically significant years right after the birth of a new nation Dwight was still unsettled regarding his future. Eventually, despite his late father's discouragement he felt compelled to forge a new path toward a career in ministry. If Dwight's decision was based on following in the footsteps of his grandfather he could not have made a clearer statement than to go study theology with his uncle, Jonathan Edwards Jr, in New Haven.⁹⁶² In 1777 Dwight was licensed to preach and married Mary Woolsey, with uncle Edwards presiding over the wedding. Interestingly, Mary Woolsey would not figure prominently in the highly visible public life of Dwight; John Fitzmier suggests perhaps this was due to the peculiarity that it was only toward the end of her long life that she professed to converting grace.⁹⁶³ Nevertheless, by this time Dwight, like the young nation itself, seemed destined for a significant future.

Dwight proved to be at home in the apocalyptic tradition of Edwards and his New Divinity mentors. In a sermon preached in 1781 after Washington's decisive victory at Yorktown, Dwight was particularly keen on interpreting the events as the preparation for the Antichrist's downfall.⁹⁶⁴ Regarding the millennium he wrote it will begin under

⁹⁶¹ Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 34-36. This section is heavily dependent on Fitzmier's Chapter 1.

⁹⁶² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶⁴ Gamble, "Last and Brightest," 27.

the seventh vial and that “Its commencement is expected by the most judicious commentators, at a time; near the year 2000,”—a date of near consensus among New Divinity Edwardseans.⁹⁶⁵ Although the millennium was acknowledge by most to be beyond their lifetimes, most believed the stage of Catholicism’s demise under the sixth vial was well underway.⁹⁶⁶ For most New Divinity leaders the help of Catholic France during the Revolution was met with a certain irony, but for Dwight it was within the purview of God’s future plan. Dwight was not as equivocal as his spiritual forefathers who saw historical events as cyclical, given the lens of their primarily afflictive model of apocalypticism. Dwight, on the other hand, was confident that Catholicism was heading on a one-way course toward its last throes. The mighty Catholic missionary force of the Jesuits all but disappeared when they were disbanded in 1773 and the decline of the Church’s power, coupled with the overthrow of tyrannical monarchs like King George III of Britain, served as harbingers of greater spiritual promises to come.⁹⁶⁷

As a young man Dwight was steeped in the world of New Divinity teachings. Having studied with his uncle Edwards, Dwight’s early theological training was in line with the Consistent Calvinism of Samuel Hopkins.⁹⁶⁸ He was part of the group of young

⁹⁶⁵ Timothy Dwight, *A Sermon Preached at Northampton, on the Twenty-eighth of November, 1781: Occasioned by the Capture of the British Army, Under the Command of Earl Cornwallis* (Hartford, CT: Nathaniel Patten, 1781), 27.

⁹⁶⁶ Dwight, *A Sermon Preached at Northampton*, 27, 29.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29. Regarding the Jesuits see also Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1798), 8-9. Also Gamble, “Last and Brightest,” 28. Samuel Hopkins also made similar observations about Catholicism and the Jesuits in his “Serious Address to Professing Christians,” in *Sketches of the Life of the Late, Rev. Samuel Hopkins*. 176.

⁹⁶⁸ Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy*, 17.

New Divinity clergymen taking over New England's Congregational churches, predominantly in Connecticut. As his reputation as a preacher spread he began to receive invitations. He was offered a position in Charlestown, MA and if there was any question about where Dwight stood theologically, a letter from March 1783 by a minister named John Eliot discussing Dwight's candidacy made it clear:

To recur to Mr. Dwight, I have given you his political character. As a divine, he is a compleat [*sic*] bigot on the plan of his grandfather, Mr. Edwards. He has studied little else in divinity but that scheme. He thunders out his anathemas against all who stir the pudding. He hath said (I know he hath the vanity to think so) that he hath supposed himself raised up in Providence to overset this system of errors.⁹⁶⁹

From the excerpt above it seems Dwight was known to be a vocal opponent of the universalism of a certain segment of New England's theological liberals. At the time an anonymous theological manuscript was in circulation advocating for the case of universal salvation. The work was eventually traced to Charles Chauncy, the Old Light nemesis of Edwards. According to John Fitzmier, "relishes the pudding" was a reference to the code word used by universalists for those who espoused universalism. Thus, to thunder against those who "stirred the pudding" meant opposing the universalists.⁹⁷⁰ John Eliot's negative assessment also derided Dwight's character, as one given to fits of vanity and an oversized sense of one's place in history. Underlying the criticism was the implication, perhaps most egregiously amongst New Divinity opponents, that there was a theological

⁹⁶⁹ Benjamin W. Dwight, *The History of the Descendants of John Dwight of Dedham, Massachusetts*, vol. 1 (New York: John F. Trow and Sons, 1874), 139. Quoted in Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 41.

⁹⁷⁰ Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 41-42.

lineage tracing back to Edwards, a tradition lacking in theological sophistication while enjoying an over-privileged valuation of itself. Whichever position Dwight took theologically there seemed to have been an element of guilt by association. He could not fully extricate himself from the view by his detractors that he was peddling his social and theological currency. Dwight turned down the Charlestown offer but eventually accepted a calling to a church in Greenfield, CT and was ordained in 1783 where uncle Edwards preached his ordination sermon.⁹⁷¹ Dwight quickly implemented an Edwardsean program in Greenfield by abrogating the Half-way Covenant and Stoddardeanism.⁹⁷²

Dwight's years at Greenfield was productive. He started a school that educated thousands of young men and women, building up a pedagogical reputation that prompted prominent families to send their children there for pre-collegiate preparation.⁹⁷³ He also continued to put forth publications. In 1787-88 Dwight wrote a poem titled *Greenfield Hill* (1794), usually considered his strongest literary work.⁹⁷⁴ While the *Conquest of Canaan* was an overwrought, allegorical rendition of the mythic origins of America, *Greenfield Hill* was a representation of the scenic, idyllic life of the New England countryside. The poem also extolled American ingenuity in its great advances in the sciences. Additionally, it addressed many social problems facing the young nation, the

⁹⁷¹ Ibid., 42.

⁹⁷² Ibid.

⁹⁷³ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., 43. Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill; a Poem, in Seven Parts* (New York: Child and Swaine, 1794).

most troubling being slavery.⁹⁷⁵ It was a reflection of the tortured duality of the New England mind, at once comfortable with elitist privilege, yet uncomfortable with social injustices, anticipating the New England Transcendentalists to come a generation later.⁹⁷⁶ Despite the conspicuous paradoxes troubling the new nation, the poem sounded an optimistic millennial tune, concluding with a tribute to an enduring American ideal:

One blood, one kindred, reach from sea to sea;
 One language spread, one tide of manners run;
 One scheme of science, and of morals one;
 And, God's own Word the structure, and the base,
 One faith extend, one worship, and one praise.⁹⁷⁷

Dwight's millennial optimism was based on his ideals of New England religiosity, especially the romanticized version of *Greenfield Hill*. For Dwight, "America ought to be Connecticutized.," quipped biographer Kenneth Silverman.⁹⁷⁸ In contrast to the idealistic conclusion of *Greenfield Hill*, the other poem Dwight published anonymously that year, *The Triumph of Infidelity* (1788), was an acerbic, satirical take on the folly of infidelity. With Voltaire (1694-1778) and David Hume as his main targets, Dwight recounted the history of the world through the lens of Satan's victories. The great scourge of modern infidelities—deism and skepticism—were not mere intellectual foils, but troubling trends affecting social morality.⁹⁷⁹ Countering infidelity became for Dwight one of his chief

⁹⁷⁵ Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 43.

⁹⁷⁶ Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 141.

⁹⁷⁷ Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 168. Excerpted in Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 43.

⁹⁷⁸ Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 96.

⁹⁷⁹ Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 44-45. Fitzmier notes Dwight denied he was the anonymous author but most scholars agree it is his work. See 193n64.

concerns at the turn of the century. Dwight was able implement his crusade against infidelity to great effect when he accepted the presidency of Yale following the death of the moderate Ezra Stiles in 1795.⁹⁸⁰

While Dwight exerted his leadership over several organizations that contributed to the Second Great Awakening, he was not on the front lines of revival preaching and itinerating. He did, however, oversee a significant change in the spiritual atmosphere at Yale. Dwight served as both president and a professor of divinity, preaching regularly at the campus chapel. At a low point the college church had only two members; after the revival in the Spring of 1802, one-third of two hundred and thirty students were converted, with over thirty of them committing themselves to ministry.⁹⁸¹ Dwight kept himself occupied with almost every facet of religious instruction but his near blindness stemming from his illness during his undergraduate days at Yale prevented him from publishing as much as he had planned. Through the aid of amanuenses Dwight was able to produce a manuscript of his chapel sermons he had dictated from memory. It was published posthumously as *Theology; Explained and Defended* (1823).⁹⁸² It became a standard theological text at places like Yale, Princeton, and Andover. Not all students at Yale were affected by Dwight and the revivals that came as a result of his campaign

⁹⁸⁰ Cunningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 166, 171-172, 302-303.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 302-303.

⁹⁸² Timothy Dwight, *Theology, Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons* (New Haven, CT: S. Converse, 1823).

against infidelity. But his tireless efforts for over two decades in instilling in his students a sense of moral rectitude would influence the next generation of Edwardseans.

Although Dwight was not a political figure his millennial manifest destiny for America extended his influence far beyond the confines of Yale. But with a national prominence came the blowback. His harshest critics were those who saw in his millennial optimism for America an overreaching Federalism. One of his earliest theological distractors was the previously mentioned David Austin, the colorful character whose strong premillennialist views challenged the optimistic postmillennialism of Dwight and many New Divinity clergymen. Using apocalyptic imagery, Austin likened the three evil spirits that looked like frogs in the sixteenth chapter of Revelation to the three pillars of New England Congregationalism at the time—Timothy Dwight, Nathan Strong, and Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826) by stating that they were “political croakers.”⁹⁸³ Another persistent thorn on Dwight’s side was John C. Ogden (1751-1800), a Yale graduate who accused Dwight of forcing Yale students to attend the college chapel. He wrote:

This last offense against law, justice, love of truth and order, is persisted in merely to give an opportunity to the President to spread Edwardean [*sic*] tenets, of which his grandfather and Calvin were teacher, that his family pride may be indulged, and his desire to appear a champion, and leader in divinity and politics—may be gratified.⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁸³ David Austin, *Dance of Herodias, Through the Streets of Hartford* (East Windsor, CT: 1799), 19-33.

⁹⁸⁴ Quoted in Fitzmier, *New England’s Moral Legislator*, 65.

Ogden would go on to paint Dwight as having more influence than the Pope of Rome. *The Philadelphia Aurora*, an anti-Federalist newspaper, labeled Dwight and his fellow Federalist leaders the “New England Illuminati.”⁹⁸⁵

Despite Dwight’s best efforts to promote revival and religion the first decade of the 1800s revealed cracks in Congregationalism’s influence on the spiritual direction of the nation. The election of 1800, where Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr Jr. finished first and second, was a rude awakening for Dwight and the Federalists. Jeffersonian disestablishment of state and church seemed inevitable. In response Dwight was instrumental in the strategy of building institutions that would preserve Congregationalist orthodoxy. He was involved in the formation of Andover Seminary, the Missionary Society of Connecticut, the American Missionary Society, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.⁹⁸⁶ After the tumult of the War of 1812, Dwight was involved in various moral reform societies, believing that institutionalizing reform for America was the best way for the young nation to fulfill its full potential.⁹⁸⁷

In the inaugural address of Andover in 1808, Dwight concluded by sounding a millennialist-inspired proclamation of worldwide missions and a renovation of humanity.⁹⁸⁸ Dwight returned to the theme of millennial missions again in a sermon he

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁶ Fitzmier, *New England’s Moral Legislator*, 72.

⁹⁸⁷ Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation*, 2nd ed. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 67.

⁹⁸⁸ Timothy Dwight, *Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Theological Institution in Andover, And at the Ordination of Rev. Eliphalet Pearson, LL.D., September 28th, 1808* (Boston: Farrand, Mallory and Co., 1808).

preached at the fourth annual meeting of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions in 1813 where he offered a prediction: “Almost all judicious commentators have agreed that the Millennium, in the full and perfect sense, will begin at a period not far from the year 2000.”⁹⁸⁹ The one judicious commentator Dwight surely had in mind was of course, Jonathan Edwards. As a postmillennialist, Dwight did not believe the millennium would suddenly appear “like the morning,” but instead “like twilight.”⁹⁹⁰ It was up to Christian American institutions to inaugurate its coming. By the latter years of his life Dwight was of ill health. But like many of his spiritual mentors before him he saw through all the troubled times the signs of the triumph of fidelity. As Napoleon’s campaigns in Europe were coming to an end Dwight believed a new era of European peace would soon appear.⁹⁹¹ Human ingenuity and progress signaled better times ahead. It was with this hope Dwight passed away on January 11, 1817.⁹⁹²

Chapter Conclusion

Despite the range of millennial views expressed by evangelical Calvinists from the time of Bellamy’s millennium sermon in 1758 to the publication of Hopkins’s *Treatise on the Millennium* in 1793, New Divinity adherents subscribed to a general

⁹⁸⁹ Timothy Dwight, *Sermon Delivered in Boston, Sept. 16, 1813, before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at Their Fourth Annual Meeting* (Boston: S. T. Armstrong, 1813), 25. Quoted in Fitzmier, *Moral Legislator*, 72.

⁹⁹⁰ Timothy Dwight, *President Dwight’s Decisions of Questions Discussed by the Senior Class in Yale College, in 1813 and 1814*, ed., Theodore Dwight, Jr. (New York: Jonathan Leavitt, 1833), 327-332. Quoted in Cunningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 337.

⁹⁹¹ Cunningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 336-337.

⁹⁹² *Ibid.*, 351-352.

framework of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought centered on a historical-redemptive model of revivalism. Diffractions from this redemptive focus emerged in line with the broader fissures in Congregationalism starting in the last decade before the turn of the century and into the first two decades of the nineteenth century. After the War of 1812, deism and infidelity replaced Arminianism and Unitarianism as the main obstacles to America's millennial future within the Edwardsean apocalyptic scheme. Timothy Dwight was the representative figure in New Divinity navigating this period of transition. Some commentators have painted Dwight as an uptight authoritarian, the Pope of Connecticut and of the Federalists.⁹⁹³ "His mind was closed as tight as his study windows in January," declared an early twentieth century critic.⁹⁹⁴ Dwight's dogmatic approach to combating infidelity allowed his enemies to impart a reputation aligned more with a Cotton Mather than a Jonathan Edwards. Kenneth Silverman might have defined a generation's worth of scholarly sentiment by writing of Dwight—"he lived only on birthday or doomsday," and further drove home the point by claiming Dwight was in essence a Manichean.⁹⁹⁵

Timothy Dwight had a millennial vision for America that sought to defeat the forces of Enlightenment infidelity. As president of Yale he initiated a revival that succeeded in stemming the tide of infidelity on campus. Dwight sought to replicate this institutionalized success in New England and for America as a whole. But his Federalist

⁹⁹³ Robert Imholt, "Timothy Dwight: Federalist Pope of Connecticut," *The New England Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (September 2000): 386-411.

⁹⁹⁴ Vernon L. Parrington, editor's introduction to *The Connecticut Wits*, ed. Vernon L. Parrington (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926), xxxix-xl.

⁹⁹⁵ Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 7, 41. Manicheanism, founded in the 3rd century AD, sees the world as a dualistic struggle between the spiritual forces of good and the material forces of evil.

faith in the power of institutions faced pushback from those opposed to the Standing Order and its long history of social control. In many ways Dwight was a leading advocate for a Christianized nation based on Congregational foundations. And although he saw the future of America in millennial terms as a spiritual battle between the godly versus the wicked he was no more a Manichean than any of his Puritan predecessors.⁹⁹⁶ Where Dwight made the greatest impact was in creating the conditions conducive for his two main disciples at Yale, Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858) and Lyman Beecher, to reframe elements of Edwardsean teaching.⁹⁹⁷ As a mentor to the final generation of New Divinity Edwardseans Dwight emerges a crucial figure in both the institutionalization of New Divinity initiatives, as well as in laying the groundwork for the redirection of the afflictive model of the redemptive history of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought by turning the focus toward social and moral concerns. In this way he can be considered the architect of the millennial turn in evangelical Calvinism led by Lyman Beecher.⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹⁶ Kenneth Silverman's characterization of Timothy Dwight as a Manichean seems outdated. Since the time after Augustine, who was literally a Manichean at one time in his life before his conversion, it became impossible to have a Christian viewpoint without employing a sense of the Augustinian duality between the city of God and the city of man. Given Silverman's definition, then nearly all Puritans were Manicheans.

⁹⁹⁷ Cunningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 327. According to Cunningham, they "softened the harsh notes" of New Divinity dogma.

⁹⁹⁸ Marc L. Harris, "Revelation and the American Republic: Timothy Dwight's Civic Participation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 3 (July 1993): 450.

CHAPTER SIX

The Socio-ethical Rise and Fall of the New Divinity Empire

Edward Dorr Griffin (1770-1837), one of the critical figures of New Divinity's third generation, recalled that the year 1792 marked a defining point in inaugurating a paradigm shift in Congregational life. First, referring to the French Revolution he wrote: "the blood began to flow in Europe"; second, the modern missionary movement began in Kettering, England; lastly, in New England there "began the unbroken series of revival."⁹⁹⁹ The convergence of these events recalibrated the priorities and processes of a generation of New Divinity clergymen who were more attuned to active participation in ministry than in spending countless hours in their study.¹⁰⁰⁰ Ironically, the motivation for such activity came from the pen of Samuel Hopkins, who like his mentor Edwards, routinely put in sixteen-hour days of study.

Hopkins's idea of "disinterested benevolence," an elaboration of the Edwardsean theme of human virtue consisting of love to Being in general, strongly influenced New Divinity ministers to social action. For Edwards, true virtue or the fruit of religious affections was reflected in a spiritual piety of "holy consciousness." For Hopkins that was too abstract so he recast true virtue as consisting of "holy action."¹⁰⁰¹ In Mark Noll's

⁹⁹⁹ Edward Dorr Griffin, "A Letter to the Rev. Dr. William Sprague," in William Buell Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Daniel Appleton & Co., 1833), 359. Cited in Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 1. Kettering, England was where William Carey initiated what is widely considered the birth of modern missions.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 41.

¹⁰⁰¹ David Kling, "The New Divinity and the Origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions." *Church History* 72, no. 4 (December 2003): 805.

pithy phrasing: “What was for Edwards an aesthetic principle with ethical implications became for Hopkins a practical principle with aesthetic implications.”¹⁰⁰² Hopkins stretched the idea of holy action to its theological limits, challenging Christ’s followers to be willing to suffer, even forsaking their own lives if it meant a soul could be saved. While Hopkins actually wrote about degrees of suffering in a metaphorical sense—willingness to suffer one degree if it meant preventing one hundred degrees for the neighbor—this was often misinterpreted by his distractors as meaning one should be ready to personally forego heaven, implying a willingness even to be damned to hell.¹⁰⁰³ Most likely Hopkins meant for such sentiments to be taken as a comparison in relation to something else, not to be taken literally.

Nevertheless, the forcefulness of Hopkins’s teaching on disinterested benevolence as selfless sacrifice raised up a generation of evangelical Calvinist spiritual warriors willing to suffer for the sake of building up the kingdom of God. David Kling notes that New Divinity theology was conducive to those who had a spiritual fervor verging on perfection and fitted for the ascetically inclined who were willing to serve the backwoods of New England congregations.¹⁰⁰⁴ The ethic of disinterested benevolence undergirded this spiritual energy and motivated the top young minds of New England to forego personal gain for the greater glory of God. Coupled with the renewed interest in the

¹⁰⁰² Noll, *America’s God*, 274.

¹⁰⁰³ Samuel Hopkins, “A Dialogue,” in *Sketches of the Life of the Late, Rev. Samuel Hopkins*, 144-149.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 26.

millennium, and specifically Edwardsean apocalyptic thought, the conditions were conducive to a dynamic interplay of revival, reform, millennialism, missions and the active engagement of building institutions for the advancement of such a synergistic effort.

The final chapter will cover several relevant figures of New Divinity's third and final generation who contributed to a reformulation of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought into its iteration as New Divinity millennialism. It will also cover the institutions instrumental in the formation of the "benevolent empire." This evangelical kingdom-building project with Edwardsean foundations furthered the New Divinity agenda of millennial social action in the nineteenth century. The chapter will conclude with a focus on Lyman Beecher as the last of the Edwardseans. His departure from Edwardsean apocalyptic thought and even the tradition of New Divinity millennialism will be explored. Finally, the implications of Beecher's "millennial turn"—a shift from the historical-redemptive to the socio-ethical—will be examined within the light of the Second Great Awakening.

New Divinity Millennialists in the Age of Action

The third generation Edwardsean who most embodied the millennial spirit of action during the Second Great Awakening with his involvement in nearly every area of New Divinity mobilization was Edward Dorr Griffin. He was, like his predecessors, deeply motivated to action by his anticipation of the millennium. Griffin was born in East

Haddam, CT in 1770 and graduated with highest honors from Yale in 1790.¹⁰⁰⁵ Not being able to mark a conversion experience in college he was bound for a career in law, but after a turn to God he changed course and went to study under Jonathan Edwards Jr. in New Haven.¹⁰⁰⁶ Griffin was by all accounts an excellent preacher and he found immediate success in New-Hartford but experienced even a greater work in Newark, NJ where in September 1807, he noted: “Began a great revival of Religion in the town. Ninety-seven joined the church in one day, and about two hundred in all.”¹⁰⁰⁷ A year later his preaching reputation earned him an appointment to the Bartlett professorship of Pulpit Eloquence at the newly formed Andover Theological Seminary and then a call to Park Street Church, a congregation formed to serve as a bastion of Trinitarian Congregationalism in the heart of Unitarian Boston.¹⁰⁰⁸ In 1815 he returned to Newark to pastor a Presbyterian church and in 1821 he took the position as president of Williams College where he remained until the year before his death in 1837.¹⁰⁰⁹

Over the course of Griffin’s life as a minister, seminary professor, and college president, he was one of the standard bearers of an Edwardsean legacy, especially in his

¹⁰⁰⁵ William B. Sprague, “Memoir of Rev. Doctor Griffin,” in *Sermons by the Late Rev. Edward D. Griffin, to which is prefixed a Memoir of His Life, by William B. Sprague*, vol. 1 (Albany, NY: Packard, Van Thuyesen & Co., 1838), 1-2. Much of the biographical material is from this work.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Sprague, “Memoir of Rev. Doctor Griffin, 5-6.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

integration of revivalism, missions, and millennialism. In 1805 Griffin preached a missionary sermon, “The Kingdom of Christ,” where he proclaimed a call to action:

My brethren, my brethren! while all the agents in the universe are employed, some with fervent desire, and others by involuntary instrumentality, to advance the cause of Christ, will an individual of you refuse it your cordial support? Can you, in the centre of universal action, consent to remain in a torpid state, absorbed in private cares, and contracted into a littleness for which you were not designed? Awake, and generously expand your desires to encircle this benevolent and holy kingdom.¹⁰¹⁰

Griffin was a close friend and colleague of Samuel J. Mills Sr. (1768-1833), Congregational minister in Torrington, CT. The younger Samuel J. Mills (1783-1818), deeply influenced by this sermon, spearheaded the movement at Williams College that would eventually lead to the creation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).¹⁰¹¹ In 1813 Griffin delivered a sermon at Sandwich, Massachusetts where he charged the congregation: “we have already seen twenty-one years that period of which is to extend the morning of the millennium.”¹⁰¹² Many commentators saw 1866 as a possible year of the fall of the Antichrist, but Griffin recalibrated the calculation and suggested if Chaldaic years were used, the date might come even earlier, possibly 1847 or 1848. For Griffin believed they were at the precipice of a new era as the papacy was nearly extinct, Muslims were in civil war after Abdul

¹⁰¹⁰ Edward Dorr Griffin, *The Kingdom of Christ: A Missionary Sermon* (Philadelphia: Jane Aiken, 1805), 24.

¹⁰¹¹ David Kling, “Edwards in the Second Great Awakening,” in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, eds. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 135.

¹⁰¹² Edward Dorr Griffin, *A Sermon, Preached October 20, 1813, at Sandwich, Massachusetts* (Boston: Nathaniel Willis, 1813), 27-28.

Wahab's (1703-1792) reformation, and Turkey was in decline.¹⁰¹³ Griffin wondered then how far advanced they were under the seventh vial:

At least the accordance is so manifest that the most distinguished writers of prophecies, though differing in other respects, have been constrained to agree in this opinion, that in 1792, the year that the great scene of carnage began in Europe, a new era opened on the world,—an era of wo to papal kingdoms, and to the countries included in the four great empires of antiquity, which is to continue till the dawn of the millennium. It appears from the last chapter of Daniel, that near the end of the 1260 years, and after the Jews are returned to their own land, “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation”; that after the termination of this grand period, two others, distinguished by some great events, will follow, one of thirty, the other forty-five “time” or years: and the prophet pronounces, “Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the” end of the latter period. This is the last step in the progress towards the full introduction of the millennium that is noted in any part of the Scriptures, and is to fall, according to the calculation, in the year of the vulgar era 1941, or rather, (reckoning by Chaldaic years,) in 1921 or 2.¹⁰¹⁴

We can see in this passage the sentiments he expressed decades later in the letter detailing the importance of the year 1792. Like most New Divinity Edwardseans, Griffin believed they were living in historically significant times regarding the millennium. The following is symbolic of the motivating factors behind New Divinity enterprises:

We have had the experience of twenty one years to cast light on this question. And what have we seen? What have we seen since the year 1792 in relation to those two countries to which the true Church is now almost entirely confined? *That very year introduced the grand era of Missions!* The first missionary society of modern origin was formed in England in 1792, and the next year commenced the far famed mission to India. Since that time the whole concourse of missionary and Bible societies, and other

¹⁰¹³ Griffin, *A Sermon, Preached October 20, 1813*, 23-24. Edwards followed a number of scholars who identified 606 B.C.E. as the date of the establishment of the Papal kingdom when Pope Boniface was made universal pope. Adding 1,260 (days) years from the prophecy of the Book of Daniel yielded 1866 as a possible date of the fall of the Antichrist. See “Apocalypse Series,” in WJE 5:129. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab is the founder of Wahabbism and his movement established the Saudi state.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

institutions in abundance for the diffusion of Christian knowledge, which now fill Great Britain and the United States, have come into existence.¹⁰¹⁵

After extolling the expanding work of missions and Bible translations, Griffin boasted:

“In a word, all those surprising exertions of Christian benevolence which have distinguished the present from all former ages since that of the apostles, have been called forth within the last twenty one years.”¹⁰¹⁶ Near the conclusion of the sermon Griffin asked rhetorically:

If the Church, now chiefly confined to two countries, is to rise from this day forth, where is it more likely to rise than in the United States, the most favoured spot on this continent which was discovered, as I may say, by the light of the Reformation? And if in the United States, where rather than in New-England? And if in New-England, where rather than in Massachusetts, which has been blessed by the prayers of so long a succession of godly ancestors?¹⁰¹⁷

He finished the sermon with a flourish, proclaiming that due to the sufferings of the fathers of New England, in the next twenty-one years the church would prosper.¹⁰¹⁸

Having learned the lesson from Edwards, the first and second generation Edwardseans were careful to avoid placing America at the center of their millennial timeline. As we saw in the previous chapter, Samuel Hopkins, Joseph Bellamy, and his New Divinity students, Levi Hart and Jonathan Edwards Jr., resisted the temptation to cast the Revolution in apocalyptic terms and put America on a millennial pedestal. But

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid., 27-31.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰¹⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

Griffin and the third generation Edwardseans led by Timothy Dwight extolled the virtues of a nationalistic, civic millennialism. Griffin even suggested an elevated role of New England and especially Massachusetts in the advancement of the Church in preparation for the millennium, harkening back to the unabashed proto-nationalism of Cotton Mather and Samuel Sewall more than a century earlier. Asked by the compiler of his memoir in 1828 what was the “cause of the difference in the mode of the operation of the Holy Spirit in Great Britain and the United States,” Griffin provided a snapshot of New England’s religious history. He answered:

The sovereignty of God. This land, which was discovered by the light of the Reformation, (in other words, by that agony of the public mind which a few years after produced the Reformation,) seems to have been reserved for the asylum of the oppressed during the troublous times before the millenium [*sic*], and as a place where the church might take her more glorious form and grow up into millenial [*sic*] beauty and splendor.¹⁰¹⁹

Griffin went on to enumerate the special providence afforded the nation for such a special destiny: 1) they did not have to overcome barbarism, but instead “began in an enlightened age, and in possession of all the knowledge and institutions of the most enlightened nation on earth;” 2) the Revolution unfettered them from the shackles of tradition; 3) the first settlers came for the sake of religion and they “were among the best part of the best nation on the face of the globe, and in its best age;” 4), they had the literary institutions that allowed every person to read the Bible; 5), they had a special privileged relationship with revivalism; 6) they celebrated the character of searching for

¹⁰¹⁹ Edward Dorr Griffin, *Sermons by the Late Rev. Edward D. Griffin, to which is Prefixed a Memoir of His Life, by William B. Sprague*, vol. 1 (Albany, NY: Packard, Van Thuyesen & Co., 1838), 166.

truth; and 7) but “the most powerful means” was “found in the distinct apprehensions which prevail in New England about the instantaneousness of regeneration,” the unrelenting call for sinners to “turn to God or be miserable.”¹⁰²⁰ Griffin’s response captured the spirit of this new generation of Edwardseans and their renewed sense of millennial privilege. And Griffin’s final and most important reason affirmed the primacy of the conversion/redemption motif of the Edwardseans. New England, in light of God’s sovereignty and providence, was specially constructed on the relentless pursuit of conversion.

As with all New Divinity Edwardseans, Griffin believed that conversion was the *sine quo non* of millennial redemptive history. For Edwardseans of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, death always functioned as a God-given opportunity for addressing concerns of conversion. Griffin lived this out when upon hearing of his nephew’s sudden passing, he wrote to his grieving brother that he had pulled his own son from college to break the news to him so that they could mourn together.¹⁰²¹ Griffin shared, “He is now reading one of the most pungent of President Edwards’ sermons. If only Charles can be made a Christian, Edmund, if he could now speak, would say, It is a good worth dying for.”¹⁰²² This was the familiar language of Samuel Hopkins’s disinterested benevolence—if a death resulted in the conversion of even one soul it was worth it. Toward the end of his life Griffin wrote to his son in reflection over his full life as a

¹⁰²⁰ Griffin, *Sermons by the Late Rev. Edward D. Griffin*, 167-169.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁰²² *Ibid.*

revivalist, promoter of missions, and a preacher, but most importantly, one born again in a land generously blessed by God:

In view of the wonderful work of redemption and the unequalled display of the divine glory therein, I have lately felt bound to thank God for selecting this distinguished world for the place of my existence; this world which is to send out a report through the universe, and to be the sun to enlighten all other worlds. And O the obligations I am under for having my birth in a land of Gospel light, and not in pagan darkness, which would have ensured my destruction; and for distinguishing me from my former companions who were left to perish, by regenerating grace, if indeed I have been born again.¹⁰²³

In the above quote we see the hallmarks of the Edwardsean emphasis on redemption and the New Birth. But for Griffin, the time and space of his very existence was a blessing that came with the obligation to spread the light of the Gospel.

Griffin was a model New Divinity leader of the age of action. But Griffin also had his share of idiosyncratic apocalyptic views. For example, he believed in the possibility of multiple worlds and thought that although in the time of the New Heavens and New Earth the saints would dwell in the third heavens, they would also be able to travel freely to the lower levels.¹⁰²⁴ But overall Griffin is another example of the remarkable continuity of New Divinity millennialism despite the diversity of opinions over a period of several decades. The shared identity was sustained by ascribing closely to the main tenets of Edwardsean theology, especially in its focus on historical-redemptive apocalypticism and revivalism and missions based on the ethic of disinterested

¹⁰²³ Ibid., 198.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid., 449-466. Edward Dorr Griffin, "God Exalted and Creatures Humbled by the Gospel," in *Fifty-Four Plain Practical Sermons* (London: R.D. Dickinson, 1871), 445-448;

benevolence. As Griffin surveyed his lifetime of religious productivity and those of his Edwardsean cohort, he expressed the sentiments of many New Divinity men and woman with the following summary:

Among the grounds of gratitude to God I have lately, and with strong feelings, placed the circumstance of living in such a day as this, so near the millenium, and when the Protestant church is waking up to strong and increasing efforts for the salvation of the world and the glory of God, If I am not delighted with the plan of salvation,—if I am not grateful to God for his wonderful and constant mercies,—if I do not love the character of God, and believe in the gospel of Christ,—if I do not repent of sin,—if I do not feel my dependence on God for all things, and trust in him who feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies, and feel resigned to his providence, whatever he sends,—if the truths of his word are not made to me glorious realities,—then I am indeed greatly mistaken as to the most sensible exercises of my own heart.¹⁰²⁵

The numerous case studies of New Divinity leaders so far reveal their deeply-imbibed Edwardsean theology and eschatology. But what kind of impact did it have in society in the Second Great Awakening? New Divinity call to millennial action was not only confined to the relatively small number of Edwardsean adherents. Especially during the first two decades of the Awakening it was influential in all the different New Divinity-led initiatives in education, missions, and social reform. But Edwardsean millennialism continued to exert its effect as the Awakening forged ahead toward its final two decades (1820-1840). One such example is the life and work of Joseph Emerson (1777-1833). In 1818, Emerson, pastor of the Third Congregational Church in Beverly, MA, published a work titled, *Lectures on the Millennium*.¹⁰²⁶ Emerson provides an

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid., 198-199.

¹⁰²⁶ Joseph Emerson, *Lectures on the Millennium* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1818).

interesting case study of a minister who straddled the increasingly fractious worlds between the cosmopolitan Unitarianism of Boston and Harvard and the action-oriented piety of the third generation of New Divinity clergy. After graduating from Harvard he went to study under Nathanael Emmons at the displeasure of his father and many friends who disapproved of the Hopkinsian system.¹⁰²⁷ Emerson never “converted” to New Divinity thought, but he had a high regard for Timothy Dwight and especially Jonathan Edwards. Regarding Dwight’s death in 1817 Emerson wrote to his brother, the Rev. Ralph Emerson (1787-1863), “Edwards and Dwight were the glory of New England. Alas, alas, the glory is departed. And yet we have reason to be thankful that these brightest stars of our hemisphere will still shine, reflected from their golden pages, till their light is obscured and lost in the blaze of millennial day.”¹⁰²⁸

Like many evangelical ministers of the day, Emerson wrote letters to loved ones regarding their eternal state. In a letter to his sister-in-law Emerson wrote:

Are you a real christian? Start not at the solemn question;—so solemn, so important, that I must repeat it—Are you a real christian? Perhaps you reply, “I know not; I would give the world to know.” Would you know? Search your own heart, search deeply and prayerfully; and diligently compare yourself with that holy book which shall be opened at the great day. Edwards on Affections may assist you in the solemn examination.¹⁰²⁹

¹⁰²⁷ Ralph Emerson, *Life of Rev. Joseph Emerson, Pastor of the Third Congregational Church in Beverly, Ms., and Subsequently Principal of a Female Seminary* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834), 45-46.

¹⁰²⁸ Emerson, *Life of Rev. Joseph Emerson*, 236.

¹⁰²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

In another letter promoting Edwards he asked: “Dear Sister S.—Have you procured Edwards's History of Redemption? How much have you read in it? How much do you read in it every day? Are you delighted with it, and exceedingly edified?”¹⁰³⁰ Emerson was a strong advocate of women’s education and opened a female seminary. Aside from the Bible, Emerson’s recommendation for theological advancement for women most likely reflected this advice given to the duties of a minister’s wife: “I would particularly recommend Mrs. Rowson’s Biblical Dialogues and Edwards on Redemption. The latter may well be studied, read, or thought over, every year. Most of Edward’s works may be read, and read, and read again, with great advantage.”¹⁰³¹ Emerson’s advocacy of Edwards’s works had long-lasting ramifications as one of his students, Mary Lyon (1797-1849), who founded Mount Holyoke Seminary for women. Lyon made it an Edwardsean institution that sent out a number of missionaries inspired by David Brainerd and the ethic of disinterested benevolence that was concretely demonstrated in his life.¹⁰³²

Emerson’s millennialism provides a window into the mind of a liberal/moderate who might qualify as an Edwardsean but not New Divinity. Emerson wrote in the *Lectures on the Millennium*: “Next to the bible, I would recommend Edwards's History of Redemption. It is probable that no man uninspired ever wrote a more valuable book

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid., 284.

¹⁰³² Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition*, 98-105. Mount Holyoke Seminary may have contributed to the legend of Brainerd and Jerusha Edwards betrothal through the pilgrimages students made to their gravesites. See Chapter 3, n481.

upon the subject of history than this.”¹⁰³³ Like Edwards, Bellamy, and Hopkins, Emerson made calculations about the population of the world proportional to the length of the millennium. But Emerson followed the work of Anglican George Stanley Faber (1773-1854), espousing the possibility of a long millennium, a period of 360,000 years, although he attributed his belief in it to a sermon he heard from Eliphalet Nott (1773-1866), the long-time president of Union College in New York.¹⁰³⁴ Emerson based his arguments on several points—that nearly every numerical reference in the Apocalypse was taken symbolically so it should be no different regarding the millennium, and that since the period of the church’s woe was believed to last 1,260 years, how much longer should the period of the church’s blessings be?¹⁰³⁵ Given Emerson was scientifically-oriented and gave lectures on astronomy it is unsurprising that his calculations are rather detailed; it is presented below to show how immersed he was in his work:

The number of square feet upon the surface of the terraqueous globe, is about 5575 billions. If at the commencement of the millennium there should be upon earth 100 million people, and this population should double once in every fifteen years for 425 years, the population of the world would then amount to 9771 billions, 677,184 millions.¹⁰³⁶

Regarding his brother’s view of the long millennium, Ralph Emerson gave a rebuttal with his own calculations that the earth would not be able to sustain the human population,

¹⁰³³ Emerson, *Lectures on the Millennium*, 240.

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid., 225, 230. For Faber’s work, see George Stanley Faber, *A Dissertation on the Prophecies, that have been Fulfilled, are now Fulfilling, or will Hereafter be Fulfilled, Relative to the Great Period of 1260 Years* (Boston: Andrews and Cummings, Greenough and Stebbins, 1808).

¹⁰³⁵ Ibid., 221-223.

¹⁰³⁶ Ralph Emerson, *Life of Rev. Joseph Emerson*, 240-241,

with bodies piling up to the sun, to which , Joseph Emerson replied, “My faith says, ‘The Lord will provide.’”¹⁰³⁷

Commenting on the *Lectures*, Ralph Emerson keenly observed that in the period of over a decade and a half since its publication, there has been “much less minute speculation respecting the millennium,” a development he agreed with, for a detail so specific was bound to be in error; the probability was more likely that the “scene will doubtless be different, in many very important respects, from what either he, or Dwight, or Edwards, or Bellamy has supposed.”¹⁰³⁸ But he also warned of “relapsing into the opposite extreme” by falling into skepticism and ignoring this precious subject taught by God.¹⁰³⁹ For Ralph Emerson, it was wise to avoid millennial speculation but also unwise to ignore its ethical applications. He wrote: “I should still think the book a very profitable one to be read for its highly practical effect on the heart and life. The spirit which pervades it, is one of love, hope, and zeal in the cause of human salvation,” and he continued, “Such were my views as to the error of minuteness, while reading the work; and still, for its moral effect, it is one of the best books I ever read.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Joseph Emerson would have agreed with his brother’s sound assessment, as he wrote: “And let us all remember, that it is much more important that we should possess the temper of the Millenarians—that we should exert ourselves to bring on the blessed day, than that we

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid., 251-252.

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid., 253.

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid.

should know its duration.”¹⁰⁴¹ Ralph Emerson wrote regarding his brother sentiments: “The millennium filled and fired his whole soul, and he gloried in the thought that every effort he made might be rendered conducive to this triumphant issue.”¹⁰⁴² This description is similar to other Edwardseans who thoroughly invested their lives in this other-worldly hope. Although Emerson was not a New Divinity Edwardsean in theological orientation, in his millenarianism he carried the spirit of Edwards, Bellamy, and Dwight.

Like the New Divinity Edwardseans at the turn of the century, Emerson’s millenarianism reflected the emphasis on holy action. In the preface to the *Lecture*, Emerson addressed the purpose for his writing: “Surely no other subject is better suited to rouse benevolent souls to action, and to urge them on to make the greatest possible exertions for the advancement of the Redeemer’s kingdom.”¹⁰⁴³ Even after much theological, scriptural, and metaphysical speculation Emerson concluded: “But the subject of the Millennium calls for something more than merely exertions to gain information respecting the signs of the times, and the duties they involve. The great end and use of knowledge, is action. If this knowledge does not excite us to be up and doing for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom, we may as well be without it.”¹⁰⁴⁴ Emerson’s Edwardsean legacy yielded practical fruit with his students going on to furthering

¹⁰⁴¹ Emerson, *Lectures on the Millennium*, 230.

¹⁰⁴² Ralph Emerson, *Life of Rev. Joseph Emerson*, 254.

¹⁰⁴³ Emerson, *Lectures on the Millennium*, v.

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

women's educational opportunities and taking an active role in foreign missions. But it might have also provided fodder for unintended negative effects. In Emerson's notes on Revelation he subscribed to the same strong anti-papacy of Edwards, even referencing Edwards's Reformed positions.¹⁰⁴⁵ But nearly a century later, what was for Edwards a mostly theological opposition to popery was for Emerson a greater practical reality. By the 1800s Catholicism was much more firmly entrenched in American culture so that in his reflections Emerson expressed ominous threats against it:

- We should separate ourselves from Popery as far as possible.
- Their sins have reached to heaven Most tremendous judgments are coming upon them. Rev. 18:4—24.
- I do believe it is a mistake for us to enter their houses of worship, or in any way bid them God speed.
- Let us do nothing to encourage their institutions.
- They are certainly treasuring up wrath.
- Let us not even look toward a nunnery, except with emotions of horror. A nunnery in Charlestown!—the most dreadful sight that these eyes have ever looked upon. A nunnery in Charlestown !—It is the flag of Babylon on the very altar of the first great burnt offering in the cause of our freedom.¹⁰⁴⁶

By all accounts Emerson was a gentle soul but this form of inflammatory rhetoric came to fruition only a year after his death. In 1834 when his memoir was published the very nunnery Emerson found scandalous in Charlestown, MA was violently attacked by Protestant mobs.¹⁰⁴⁷ Religious action, often spurred on by apocalyptic impulses, was not always progressive.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ralph Emerson, *Life of Rev. Joseph Emerson*, 333.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴⁷ For the Ursuline Convent Riots, see Nancy L. Schultz, *Fire and Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent* (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

New Divinity Millennialists in the Age of Organization

The counterpart to the powerful call to New Divinity social action was social organization. H. Reinhold Niebuhr described the Protestant enterprise in America as a movement seeking to establish the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁴⁸ In large part American Protestantism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was bolstered by building up a kingdom of Protestant institutions in keeping with its kingdom theology. The origins of institutional kingdom-building as a manifest, viable strategy can be traced back to the late eighteenth century. In an incisive article Donald Mathews takes a socio-historical approach in his analysis of the Second Great Awakening, suggesting perhaps more than theology or even revivalism, it can be viewed primarily as an “organizing process.”¹⁰⁴⁹ Taking a look at how movements take shape, Mathews argues along the lines of Gordon Wood that the social strain of post-Revolutionary America produced the conditions requiring a level of organization that brought forth profound social and religious changes.¹⁰⁵⁰ This was a refreshing corrective to an older interpretation that New England Calvinists, in response to their declining influence, used reform and religious institutions as a means of social control over their increasingly independent congregations.¹⁰⁵¹

¹⁰⁴⁸ Niebuhr, *Kingdom of God*, ix.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organization Process: 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 23-43.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 32. Mathews cites Gordon Wood, “Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (January 1966): 3-32.

¹⁰⁵¹ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 184. Conforti cites Sidney Mead’s *Nathaniel William Taylor*, as the most influential take on this view. Mead does not argue that the institutions were used for social control but that in many ways the movement was reactionary. See also Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy*. A counterargument is made in Lois Banner, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation,” *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (June 1973): 25-41.

According to the social control interpretation, the Second Great Awakening was led by evangelical Calvinists (mostly New Divinity Congregationalists in New England) who were reacting to social forces. Inroads by Methodists and Baptists forced the hand of evangelical Calvinists to partially adopt the moral ability argument of Arminianism, along with the individualism of the Baptists, thereby democratizing and popularizing, or “softening the harsh tones” of their high Calvinism. Joseph Conforti acknowledges this interpretation is somewhat valid after 1820, during what is considered the last phase of the Awakening where Jacksonian Democracy and the “new revivalistic measures” of Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) held sway over the revivals.¹⁰⁵² By this time New Divinity’s leading position in the Awakening was challenged and eventually usurped by Finney, the Methodists, and the Baptists. New Divinity influence even within the broader circle of evangelical Calvinism was superseded by Timothy Dwight’s quasi-Edwardsean students, Nathaniel William Taylor and Lyman Beecher, who were the main representatives of this prevailing trend.¹⁰⁵³

In the first two decades of the Awakening, however, New Divinity leaders were actively and dynamically navigating the contours of the revivals. Based on their proactive involvement in social reform and institution-building it is questionable to think they were somehow debilitated by a sense of waning influence and merely promoting revival and

¹⁰⁵² Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity*, 184.

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid. See also Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 4. William R. Sutton, “Benevolent Calvinism and the Moral Government of God: The Influence of Nathaniel W. Taylor in Revivalism in the Second Great Awakening,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 2 (Winter 1992): 24, 26.

reform as a form of self-preservation.¹⁰⁵⁴ Highly motivated New Divinity ministers were at the forefront of organizing ways to grow and sustain the revivals. At the same time, they were conscious of actively countering a myriad of social and religious headwinds. The socio-political and religious situation was highly disruptive to New England Congregationalism during the era of the Second Great Awakening. The rise of Methodists and Baptists and disestablishment were only some of the many forces in effect. One of the most troubling signs of the times reflecting societal declension was disestablishment, the political principle of separating the powers between church and state. The practical ramification of disestablishment in New England was that Congregationalism would no longer enjoy its privileges as a state-sponsored entity. With ministry transitioning from a calling to a profession, even the sacrosanct clerical authority of Congregational ministers was weakened and the congregation's submission and loyalty to the position waned.¹⁰⁵⁵ Forming both socially-conscious religious organizations and religiously-motivated social organizations became a foundational strategy for combating infidelity and what they viewed as society's rapid spiritual decline.

New Divinity and Building the Benevolent Empire

The call to social action based on Hopkins's virtue ethic of disinterested benevolence resulted in the founding of a number of organizations tasked with New Divinity-inspired outreach. In anticipation of disestablishment, most denominations had

¹⁰⁵⁴ Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control," 26.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 29-51.

prepared for the day they would become another voluntary association.¹⁰⁵⁶ They learned to contend in the arena of the marketplace of ideas, interest, and social commitment. They soon turned the spirit of voluntarism to their advantage by institutionalizing voluntary action. Reform organizations, missionary societies, educational institutions, and religious publications were formalized and their institutionalization became a formidable strategy in countering the religiously destabilizing effects of disestablishment. Perhaps it can be argued that the inevitability of disestablishment brought forth the creative and proactive energies necessary for the church's survival. Even before official missionary societies, church associations were heavily involved in outreach efforts to natives and in rare cases, even to slaves. But the urgency of institutional action in the aftermath of disestablishment underscored the existential threat the Congregational churches thought they were facing. Initially, New Divinity evangelical Calvinists found themselves in a privileged position as the ones best prepared for the task of organization and institution-building. This was in large part due to their connection to their Edwardsean past.¹⁰⁵⁷

While many organizations of the benevolent empire rose in conjunction with the spread of the revivals that started in New England in the 1790s, the spirit of gathering and organizing predated them. During the First Great Awakening, Edwards had organized youth, young adult, women's and various group meetings styled after Continental

¹⁰⁵⁶ Cushing, "Notes on Disestablishment in Massachusetts," 169-190. Richard Shiels, "The Scope of the Second Great Awakening: Andover, Massachusetts, as a Case Study," *Journal of Early Republic Studies* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 228.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 43, 45,

Pietism's small-group gatherings. This tradition of organization was put into efficacious effect during the Second Great Awakening. The network of New Divinity ministers allowed for effective mobilization. Thus the early phase of building the benevolent empire was dominated by New Divinity Edwardseans because they had the necessary infrastructures in place, the most important being an interconnected web of built-in relationships. Douglas Sweeney writes regarding this time period that "it would not be inappropriate to speak of an Edwardsian enculturation of Calvinist New England."¹⁰⁵⁸

The millennial roots of New Divinity's benevolent empire can be traced back to Edwards's 1747 treatise, the *Humble Attempt*, where he sought to replicate the Concert of Prayer in America. These specially designated public prayer meetings originated in Scotland during the 1740s with the expressed goal of ushering in the millennial age.¹⁰⁵⁹ Although Edwards was never able to implement the program with any success during his lifetime, a generation later English Particular Baptists would be inspired by his writings to resurrect the prayer meetings, which resulted in the founding of the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen (known as the Baptist Missionary Society) in 1792.¹⁰⁶⁰ The mission society's commissioning of William Carey (1761-1834) is widely considered the birth of the modern missionary movement.¹⁰⁶¹ In

¹⁰⁵⁸ Douglas Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40.

¹⁰⁵⁹ See Jonathan Edwards's letter to his Scottish counterparts in his desire to join the Concert of Prayer. To a Correspondent in Scotland, November 1745, in WJE 16:197.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Oliver Wendell Elsbree, "The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in New England, 1790-1815," *The New England Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (July 1928): 310-311.

¹⁰⁶¹ Elsbree, "The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in New England," 310-311.

the nascent years of the Second Great Awakening, the Concert of Prayer made its way back to the shores of New England, where in 1794 a committee of ministers met in Lebanon, CT to devote the first Tuesday of every quarter of the year, beginning at two in the afternoon to pray for various topics like the conversion of the Jews and the heathens as well as for the inauguration of the millennial kingdom.¹⁰⁶² They implemented strategies used effectively during the American Revolution such as distributing circular letters promoting the meetings.¹⁰⁶³ There was also a coordinated effort to reissue Edwardsean millennial and missional works, including *A History of the Work of Redemption*, edited by his son, Jonathan Edwards Jr., in 1792, *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd* in 1793, and David Austin's compilation of Bellamy's treatise, *The Millennium*, and Edwards's *Humble Attempt* in 1794, which came a year after Hopkins's own *Treatise on the Millennium*.¹⁰⁶⁴

The Edwardsean influence of the Concert of Prayer reached far and wide as attested to by William Linn (1752-1808), a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in New York. In his millennial work, *Discourses on the Signs of the Times* (1794), he wrote that at the time of its printing he was handed a letter with "an invitation to the ministers and churches of every Christian denomination throughout the United States, 'to unite in an attempt to carry into execution the Humble attempt of President Edwards to promote

¹⁰⁶² Ibid., 311. See also Joseph Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 16.

¹⁰⁶³ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture*, 16.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid., 200n15.

explicit agreement and visible union of God's people in extraordinary prayer for the revival of religion, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth."¹⁰⁶⁵ Linn expressed his desire for different denominations to gather together for such prayer.¹⁰⁶⁶ Like many millennial publications during this last decade of the eighteenth century, Linn was prompted to write on the signs of the times because the season was ripe for it, as he noted in his preface: "The Author never despaired of the Success of the French Revolution; and the Events which have taken Place during the Summer, confirm him in the Opinion that civil Liberty will universally prevail, and that God is preparing the Way for the Introduction of a glorious Scene upon Earth."¹⁰⁶⁷ Not only is Linn's work an example of renewed millennial interest across denominations and regions during this time, it also highlights the beginnings of an extended appropriation of Edwardsean apocalyptic thought.

Concomitant with the revivals was the primacy of missions as a way of expediting the millennium. Beginning in the mid-1790s, state church associations began to lay out a more systematic approach to both home and foreign missions. Originally under the auspices of the Hartford North Association, the Connecticut Missionary Society (CSM) was formed in order to send preachers and missionaries to convert those on the western borders of the frontier.¹⁰⁶⁸ By 1798 the statewide General Association of Connecticut

¹⁰⁶⁵ William Linn, *Discourses on the Signs of the Times* (New York: Thomas Greenleaf, 1794), 175. Referenced in Elsbree, *Rise of the Missionary Spirit*, 311.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Linn, *Discourses on the Signs of the Times*, 175.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 64.

churches took official charge over the society. Within a few years revivals were reported throughout Connecticut, which prompted the founding of the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* (CEM).¹⁰⁶⁹ The magazine published detailed reports of the revivals and promoted the expansion of Connecticut's missionary outreach with a readership extending all the way to the Western Reserve of Ohio.¹⁰⁷⁰ Roughly from 1798 to 1808, those who identified as Edwardseans set the agenda for frontier missions.¹⁰⁷¹ Through the *CEM* and many similar publications that came into circulation in the early 1800s, any cause related to missions and the millennium was deemed an opportunity for publicity. For instance, when good news from the "The London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews" reached American shores, various societies were formed to aid in the effort, including the formation of "The Female Society of Boston and vicinity, for promoting Christianity among the Jews."¹⁰⁷² Calls to raise money for millennial causes were promoted by the *Panoplist*, another popular journal founded in 1805 by Jedidiah Morse, a Congregationalist minister in Charlestown, MA, who had studied under the younger Edwards.¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁶⁹ Richard Shiels, "The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut: Critique of the Traditional Interpretation," *Church History* 49, no. 4 (December 1980): 407.

¹⁰⁷⁰ John R. Pankratz, "Reading the Revival: 'The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine' and the Communications Circuit on the Early Western Reserve," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 77, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 237-238.

¹⁰⁷¹ Kling, "The New Divinity and the Origins," 814.

¹⁰⁷² Elsbree, "The Rise of the Missionary Spirit," 309.

¹⁰⁷³ *Ibid.* See also Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "The New England Theology in New England Congregationalism," in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 171.

The founding of Andover Theological Seminary in 1808 and the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1810 stand out as prime examples of the synergy New Divinity leaders created in integrating theological education, revival, and missions for the service of building the benevolent empire. New Divinity leadership was well-positioned in many of the Northeast's colleges in the first-half of the nineteenth century—at various points they held the presidencies of Yale, Dartmouth, Williams, Amherst, Middlebury, Union, Hamilton and more.¹⁰⁷⁴ But it was only a matter of time before a cultural and theological battle would erupt at America's first college, Harvard. When David Tappan (1752-1803), a Congregationalist who held Harvard's Hollis Chair of Divinity (the oldest and most distinguished professorship at the time) died in 1803, the liberal faction of the school seized the opportunity by appointing Henry Ware (1764-1845), a Unitarian sympathizer, to the prestigious chair.¹⁰⁷⁵ For conservatives at Harvard this episode must have seemed eerily similar to Cotton Mather's failure to win the presidency nearly a century before, resulting in the founding of Yale. The liberals had finally wrested control of Harvard and Yale did not seem inured from a similar fate.

As a countermeasure, conservatives united to form a theological seminary that would serve as a bastion of New England Congregational Calvinist orthodoxy. Andover Theological Seminary, the first professional graduate school for theological training in

¹⁰⁷⁴ Kling, "The New Divinity and the Origins," 811.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 4.

the United States, was formed after a prolonged negotiation between New Divinity clergy and the Old Calvinists, who like the Old Lights a generation before disapproved of New Divinity's evangelical revivalism. A compromise was pushed through by two prominent New Divinity leaders, Leonard Woods (1774-1854), one of the original teachers of Andover as professor of Christian theology, and Samuel Spring (1746-1819), a staunch Hopkinsian, having studied under the namesake.¹⁰⁷⁶ If there was any doubt as to which faction would dictate Andover's agenda, the inaugural sermon for the school was delivered by Timothy Dwight. In the inaugural address Dwight could not help but set a millennial tone for the moment by proclaiming: "The period is hastening: the morning star will soon arise which will usher in that illustrious day, destined to scatter the darkness of this melancholy world, and cover the earth with light and glory; the second birthday of truth, righteousness, and salvation."¹⁰⁷⁷

For the first two decades of Andover, the strong New Divinity leadership made it an Edwardsean stronghold. As the school's appointed chronicler of its founding, Leonard Woods proclaimed: "I have said that Calvinists of the Edwardean School constituted a large proportion of the Congregational ministers of New England. Edwards was constantly spoken of as the standard or type of New England theology."¹⁰⁷⁸ As E. Brooks Holifield notes, although the formation of Andover was the coming together of two

¹⁰⁷⁶ Leonard Woods, *History of the Andover Theological Seminary* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1885), 75, 78, 83, 101-102.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Panoplist*, March, 1809, "Sermon by Timothy Dwight at the opening of Andover Theological Seminary, Sept. 28, 1808."

¹⁰⁷⁸ Woods, *History of Andover*, 40.

streams of Calvinism under the label of “the New England theology,” it eventually took on the characteristics of the New Divinity.¹⁰⁷⁹ From the school’s inception it became heavily invested in two movements that defined Edwardsean tradition—revivalism and missions.

The founding of Andover was closely associated with the creation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) By the 1800s most of the states in the Northeast had at least one missionary agency but ABCFM was the first national missionary organization. The genesis of ABCFM can be traced back to Samuel J. Mills Jr., whose devoted mother consecrated the child to the service of God as a future missionary in the mold of the self-sacrificial, disinterested benevolence of John Eliot and David Brainerd.¹⁰⁸⁰ As a young man Mills was caught up in the revival of his father’s church in Torrington, CT in 1798, though his personal profession of Christ would come a few years later.¹⁰⁸¹ Due to a combination of financial reasons and familial connections, Mills enrolled at Williams College instead of Yale, his father’s alma mater.¹⁰⁸² At Williams he and four other students gathered regularly to pray for foreign missions.

On a fateful day in 1806, while taking shelter from a rainstorm in a haystack, the students committed their lives as overseas missionaries. The Haystack Prayer Meeting, as

¹⁰⁷⁹ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 342.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Joseph Tracy, *History of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, 2nd Edition (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1842), 22-23.

¹⁰⁸¹ Kling, “The New Divinity and the Origins,” 814.

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*

it came to be known, became a pivotal symbolic moment for American foreign missions.¹⁰⁸³ Mills went on to graduate studies at the recently formed Andover Theological Seminary, where he befriended the recently converted Adoniram Judson (1788-1850). Together they were instrumental in forming the organization that would eventually become ABCFM, which was formally recognized in 1810.¹⁰⁸⁴ On February 6, 1812, the first American overseas missionaries, Samuel Newell, Adoniram Judson, Jr., Samuel Nott, Jr., Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice, were commissioned at the Tabernacle Church in Salem, MA.¹⁰⁸⁵ At the commissioning service, Leonard Woods proclaimed these missionaries from American soil were a fulfillment of prophecy and that “the millennial glory of the church was about to be ushered in.”¹⁰⁸⁶ As a professor at Andover Theological Seminary, Woods had good reason to be overly enthusiastic for all five commissioned were from the school. In fact, in the first decade of the formation of the ABCFM, all but one sent out were from Andover. Within forty years, over one hundred missionaries served through the agency.¹⁰⁸⁷

Many of these young men and women volunteered for foreign missions because they believed that the millennial age was near and God wanted to use them for the special purpose of bringing it to its threshold. Although the young missionaries learned to

¹⁰⁸³ *Ibid.*, 792.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Tracy, *History of the American Board*, 25-27.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 33. Tracy mistakenly put the date as February 6, 1811, a year earlier.

¹⁰⁸⁶ “Sermon by Leonard Woods delivered in Salem February 6, 1812 at the ordination of Newell, Judson, Nott, Hall and Rice.” Quoted in Elsbree, “The Rise of the Missionary Spirit,” 320.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Daniel Day Williams, *The Andover Liberals* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 9.

embrace the millennial spirit of their teachers, they were more optimistic about the church's role in it.¹⁰⁸⁸ New Divinity leaders, too, were caught up in this new program of global outreach. They continued to preach about the struggles of the church and the spiritual battles ahead, but they also wrote of the immanence of the coming millennium with far more assuredness than their predecessors. Nathan Strong Jr. preached a Thanksgiving sermon in 1798 extolling the fulfillment of five vials already, stating: "it is the sixth and seventh vials in combination that are now running."¹⁰⁸⁹ He then referred to Timothy Dwight's Fourth of July sermon earlier that year: "An ingenious and learned sermon, lately published by the Rev. President Dwight, hath justly explained the three impure spirits, under the sixth vial, that went out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, to mean the principles of infidelity."¹⁰⁹⁰

Timothy Dwight's millennial manifest destiny for America took on even greater significance in the age of regional revivals and worldwide missions. As covered in Chapter 5, millennial optimism was not just the province of New Divinity ministers. Dwight's fellow "Connecticut Wits" from his college days like Joel Barlow and John Turnbull expressed poetic visions of the millennium that largely reflected the optimistic mood of the nation. But the sustained duration and heat of the revivals beginning in the

¹⁰⁸⁸ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 61.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Nathan Strong, "Political Instruction from the Prophecies of God's Word: A sermon, preached...Nov. 29, 1798" (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1798), 23. Quoted in Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 59.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Strong, "Political Instruction from the Prophecies of God's Word," 23.

late 1790s enflamed millennial rhetoric beyond that of mere patriotic language. With town after town being overturned by the message of repentance and renewal, the ambivalent tone toward the Awakening and the afflictive view of the future of the church gave way to unbridled optimism and imminent millennial anticipation. Jedidiah Morse, who was instrumental in the formation of Andover, expressed the millennial hope of the day in a sermon he preached in 1810 before the Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians and Others in North America.¹⁰⁹¹ Taking a passage from Daniel 12:4, 10, he surmised that the Eastern and Western Antichrists—the Turkish Empire and the Papacy—would be overthrown, the Jews would return to their homeland, there would be a worldwide conversion of the Gentiles, and then will commence the millennium.¹⁰⁹²

Due to a variety of reasons Samuel J. Mills Jr. never fulfilled his lifelong passion to go on overseas missions, but he was a tireless organizer and was instrumental in founding many New Divinity-led institutions. The American Bible Society, established in New York in 1816, was the first national organization of its kind and a brainchild of Mills.¹⁰⁹³ In 1817, the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, CT was established because Mills wanted to train Henry Obookiah (1792-1818), a native of Hawaii, to become a

¹⁰⁹¹ Jedidiah Morse, “Signs of the Times: A Sermon Delivered Before the Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians and Others in North America, Nov. 1, 1810” (Charlestown, MA: S.T. Armstrong, 1810).

¹⁰⁹² Morse, “Signs of the Times,” 8-10, 18, 22, 37.

¹⁰⁹³ Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut, *The Great Awakening and Other Revivals in the Religious Life of Connecticut* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1934), 38.

missionary back to his homeland.¹⁰⁹⁴ Many local Tract Societies led to the formation of the American Tract Society in 1825. The establishment of all these missional institutions prompted the New Divinity minister, Samuel Mills Sr., to proclaim: “Wonderful day! Wonderful day! The Bible Society; the Tract Society; the Missionary Society—the waters of the Sanctuary are rising and rising; and by and bye they will overspread the whole earth, and then the latter day of glory will come in!”¹⁰⁹⁵ Coming from the mouth of an old revivalist who outlived the shortened life of his prolific son, it touched the hearts of many who were converted through such means.¹⁰⁹⁶ The millennial hope predicated on missions and worldwide evangelism was contagious. In the annual meeting of the Foreign Missionary Society of Litchfield County in 1815, Joseph Harvey of Goshen, preached with confidence that the millennium would begin in fifty years.¹⁰⁹⁷ This enthusiasm cut across generations, as after another season of revival in 1831, Sereno Edwards Dwight (1786-1850), the son of Timothy Dwight, declared, “I do not see why we may not consider the Millennium as now commencing.”¹⁰⁹⁸ With a number of highly motivated, well-qualified young men and women heeding the call to action and the

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid. For information on the life of Henry Obookiah see Edwin W. Dwight, *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah, a Native of Owhyhee, and a Member of the Foreign Mission School* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830).

¹⁰⁹⁵ Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut, *The Great Awakening*, 38.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ibid. Samuel J. Mills Jr. died at sea in 1818 while on a mission to purchase land for the American Colonization Society, which he helped found. Mills’s work on behalf of the society resulted in the establishment of Liberia.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid., 39.

proliferation of institutions in support of their agenda, the future success of the New Divinity kingdom seemed assured. But those who subscribed to the afflictive model of Edwardsean apocalypticism understood that things would have to get worse before it got better.

What the third generation Edwardseans and the case study of Joseph Emerson, who was deeply influenced by Edwardsean apocalyptic thought, reveal is that during the time of heightened religiosity in the Second Great Awakening, apocalyptic theory tended toward the trajectory of action and organization. New Divinity leaders like Timothy Dwight, Edward Dorr Griffin, and Samuel J. Mills Jr. paved the way for Edwardsean apocalyptic thought—via the ethic of Hopkins’s disinterested benevolence—to be applied to many practical areas of life affecting the churches, educational institutions, missions, commerce, politics, and more. But behind society’s seemingly steady linear progress conducive to a postmillennial outlook was the lingering presence of troubling social issues such as slavery and women’s rights. The person who embodied the merging of the age of action with the turn toward pressing social issues was Lyman Beecher. Inspired by the American millennial manifest destiny of his teacher, Timothy Dwight, Beecher would go on to set an ambitious socio-ethical agenda for the young nation.

Lyman Beecher and the Socio-ethical Institutionalization of Revival and Reform

Although up to the 1820s the New Divinity strategy of millennial kingdom-building had created an enviable array of institutions that made up the benevolent empire, beneath the flourishing façade was a crumbling infrastructure of fragile Edwardsean foundations. Lyman Beecher is the representative figure of the transition from a New

Divinity-led agenda of revival and reform to a more complex, broader, multi-dimensional and multi-denominational picture of religious activity in New England. The strength of Edwards's New Light approach in the First Great Awakening was that no matter the circumstance—whether awakened or in declension—God was sovereign and his will would be accomplished in due time. In the Second Great Awakening, after more than two decades of sustained revivals, human ability to affect divine outcomes seemed more viable. New Divinity ministers continued to operate under the Calvinist doctrine of election and predestination, but they could no longer stem the tide of humanistic considerations in the new calculus of conversion. As David Kling notes, “with God obviously blessing their efforts, they concluded that they and God were somehow engaged in an active partnership.”¹⁰⁹⁹ It would not be long before the notion of the moral inability of the sinner was deemed insufficient in the economy of salvation. Eventually, New Divinity thought was subsumed by the New Haven theology of Nathaniel William Taylor, which undermined the more hyper-Calvinist elements of Hopkinsianism.¹¹⁰⁰ Beecher was both the benefactor and agent of this change.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Kling, *Field of Divine Wonders*, 11.

¹¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3. Taylor's New Haven theology tried to cater Calvinism to better fit the modern mindset that increasingly embraced a human-centric Arminianism. Taylor's views on natural ability seemed to undermine the firm commitment to original sin espoused by the tradition of Edwards, Bellamy, and Hopkins. A conservative faction of Edwardseans led by Bennet Tyler (1783-1858), president of Dartmouth College, opposed Taylor, creating a factionalism among Edwardseans into competing camps—Taylorites and Tylerites. While the intricacies of the division are outside the scope of the dissertation, Beecher was a strong proponent of his good friend Taylor. For further discussion, see Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor*, 69-151. Sweeney argues that Taylor's opponents misconstrued his largely complementary rendering of Edwardsean theology.

Lyman Beecher was born on October 12, 1775, right at the beginning of the American Revolution.¹¹⁰¹ As a child of the critical period of the nation's tenuous beginnings, Beecher's life was fraught with growing pains. His mother died of consumption two days after his birth. His father sent him to live with his farmer uncle, Lot Benton, and into his pious household where the young Beecher would be raised. As a child Beecher was given to daydreaming while farming, forcing his Uncle Lot to concede: "Lyman would never be good for anything but to go to college."¹¹⁰² He entered Yale in 1793, the year Samuel Hopkins published his theological system and millennial treatise. Beecher was not atypical of the rural yeomen class of Connecticut young men who went to Yale and became a New Divinity clergyman.¹¹⁰³

That transformation began after the death of Ezra Stiles and the ensuing installation of Timothy Dwight as the school's new president in 1795. Beecher was immediately taken by the revival sermons of Dwight but would not mark a conversion experience until later in his junior year; even then he struggled over his faith well into his senior year until he finally felt a sense of the assurance of salvation and a subsequent calling into the ministry.¹¹⁰⁴ After graduation he received theological training under Dwight and in 1799 he accepted a position at the Presbyterian Church of East Hampton

¹¹⁰¹ Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 4. Much of the biographical material is from this work.

¹¹⁰² Rugoff, *The Beechers*, 5.

¹¹⁰³ Vincent Harding, *Lyman Beecher and the Transformation of American Protestantism, 1775-1863* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 11-12.

¹¹⁰⁴ Rugoff, *The Beechers*, 10.

in Long Island, New York, whose predecessor was the renowned Edwardsean revivalist of the First Great Awakening, Samuel Buell.¹¹⁰⁵ With this pedigree Beecher went to work and almost immediately, in January 1800, he marked his first experience of leading a congregation to revival.¹¹⁰⁶ For the next three decades Beecher's name would become synonymous with the Second Great Awakening just as Edwards's was to the First. During this time he became the most renowned preacher perhaps in all of America.¹¹⁰⁷

Beecher had always considered himself a disciple of Dwight and an Edwardsean at heart. In 1832 he claimed that Edwards and Bellamy were "the authors which contributed to form and settle my faith."¹¹⁰⁸ He wrote to his son, George, who was studying at Yale, "Next after the Bible, read and study Edwards, whom to understand in theology, accommodated to use, will be as high praise in theological science as to understand Newton's works in accommodation to modern uses of natural philosophy." Beecher gave high praise to Edwards's piety and ability to put truth to conscience, adding, "In this respect Edwards stands unrivaled. There is in his revival sermons more discrimination, power of argument, and pungency of application than are contained in all the sermons beside which were ever written. Study as models Edwards's applications.

¹¹⁰⁵ James W. Fraser, *Pedagogue for God's Kingdom: Lyman Beecher and the Second Great Awakening* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 14-15.

¹¹⁰⁶ Fraser, *Pedagogue for God's Kingdom*, 14-15.

¹¹⁰⁷ Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 38.

¹¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Valerie, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 5.

They are original, multiform, and powerful beyond measure.”¹¹⁰⁹ Edwards’s *Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God* was a favorite of his, although his second wife, Harriet Porter, was said to have fled from horror as it was read aloud in her presence.¹¹¹⁰ In defense of the theological controversies that surrounded his life he offered a justification of his position, aligning himself in the line of Bellamy but with a nod to the moral free agency of his close friend Nathaniel William Taylor and his New Haven theology:

I never despised creeds. I did not neglect the writings of great and good men. But I always commenced my investigations of Christian doctrines, duty, and experience with the teachings of the Bible, considered as a system of moral government, legal and evangelical, in the hand of a Mediator, administered by his word and Spirit, over a world of rebel, free, and accountable subjects.¹¹¹¹

Like Nathanael Emmons and Edward Dorr Griffin, Beecher was not someone who could be completely confined by a system or school of thought. His attempts to bridge Consistent Calvinists with Taylor and New Haven theology made Beecher seemingly equivocate on theological matters. But from early on he saw himself as a pragmatist. He believed that the most effective sermons were those that produced results. About his rhetorical approach he wrote: “I could see there was interest when I spoke. The fact is, I made the application of my sermons about as pungent then as ever afterward.”¹¹¹² Regarding Edwards he said: “I had read Edwards's Sermons. There's

¹¹⁰⁹ Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, vol. 2, Charles Beecher, ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 238. Beecher’s *Autobiography* heretofore referred as ACELB, followed by volume and page number.

¹¹¹⁰ Constance M. Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), 34.

¹¹¹¹ Beecher, ACELB1:71.

¹¹¹² *Ibid.*,70.

nothing comes within a thousand miles of them now,” but added that he never tried to copy his or anyone else’s preaching style or language.¹¹¹³ Beecher acknowledged he did not possess the disposition of an academic—referring to a linguist friend he explained, “He could plod, collect, compile, and I could not,” but instead, he proclaimed, “I was made for action.”¹¹¹⁴

Beecher made it clear early in his autobiography that he was driven by a profoundly palpable sense of millennial urgency. Of this he wrote:

I had studied the prophecies, and knew that the punishment of the Antichristian powers was just at hand. I read also the signs of the times. I felt as if the conversion of the world to Christ was near. It was with such views of the prophetic future that I from the beginning consecrated myself to Christ, with special reference to the scenes I saw to be opening upon the world. I have never laid out great plans. I have always waited, and watched the fulfillments of prophecy, and followed the leadings of Providence.¹¹¹⁵

What his detractors saw as personal ambition, Beecher attributed to a special calling that “widened the scope of my activities beyond the common sphere of pastoral labor.”¹¹¹⁶ For over fifty years Beecher labored at full speed, describing his activities as though he were a thrill-seeking adventurer: “For I soon found myself harnessed to the Chariot of Christ, whose wheels of fire have rolled onward, high and dreadful to his foes, and glorious to his friends. I could not stop.”¹¹¹⁷

¹¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁵ Ibid., 70-71.

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Beecher experienced two huge losses when in 1817 his mentor, Timothy Dwight, died. Beecher later recollected of Dwight, “He always met me with a smile. Oh, how I loved him! I loved him as my own soul, and he loved me as a son.”¹¹¹⁸ Then a year later the Standing Order of Congregationalism suffered its own demise in the state of Connecticut with the adoption of disestablishment. Beecher was at once appalled at the triumph of infidelity, but excited about the new possibilities. He expressed his mixed emotions with the following:

It was as dark a day as ever I saw. The odium thrown upon the ministry was inconceivable. The injury done to the cause of Christ, as we then supposed, was irreparable. For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell *for the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut*. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God.¹¹¹⁹

For Beecher, disestablishment did not lessen the influence of ministers; in reverse effect, it increased it due to all the voluntary institutions that promoted the reform of society.¹¹²⁰ The death of Dwight might have had a similar effect of disestablishment on the theological moorings of Beecher. As his theological foundations shifted from Dwight’s New Divinity to Taylor’s New Haven theology, the move freed him to make greater use of the language of moral ability in his revival preaching. But the theological battles would come later. For the next decade Beecher was determined to effect change through the institutionalization of revival and reform and was most instrumental in building up

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹¹¹⁹ Ibid., 344.

¹¹²⁰ Ibid.

the benevolent empire of evangelical Calvinism, especially in his role as a leading spokesperson for the various social and moral causes.¹¹²¹

Out of a long list of antagonists, Beecher's single greatest source of vitriol was against Unitarianism, which he equated with theological liberalism. Ever willing to do battle, in 1826 he accepted a call in Boston to the Congregational Hanover Street Church to be on the frontlines in the heart of the Unitarian city.¹¹²² Beecher intended to rejuvenate a Calvinist revival in Boston, but the number of conversions exceeded expectations, reviving his own bouts with illness and depression.¹¹²³ Like Edwards, Beecher strongly believed revivalism was the most efficacious method of bringing instantaneous change. What better way was there to promote revivals while he was in Boston than to invoke the revivalism of the Puritan forefathers? In 1828 Beecher began *The Spirit of the Pilgrims*, a journal dedicated to promoting revival and attacking Unitarianism.¹¹²⁴ He also preached a sermon, *Memory of our Fathers*, a paean to the socio-religious structures that infused Puritan culture into New England soil and in particular the sacredness to which they accorded the Sabbath. "The great excellence of these institutions is, that they are practical and powerful," Beecher gushed.¹¹²⁵ Beecher

¹¹²¹ Fraser, *Pedagogue for God's Kingdom*, 34.

¹¹²² Stuart C. Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan: A Portrait of Lyman Beecher* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 61.

¹¹²³ Rugoff, *The Beechers*, 68-72.

¹¹²⁴ Conforti, "The Invention of the Great Awakening," 102, 115n6.

¹¹²⁵ Lyman Beecher, *The Memory of Our Fathers*, in *Beecher's Works: Sermons Delivered on Various Occasions*, vol. 1 (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), 323. Beecher's *Works* heretofore referred as BW, followed by volume and page number.

acknowledged that the times were different then and now, but that God provided the means to address the greater diversification of culture through the spirit of revival. He summarized:

But, at the very time when the civil law had become impotent for the support of religion and the prevention of immoralities, God began to pour out his Spirit upon the churches; and voluntary associations of Christians were raised up, to apply and extend, that influence which the law could no longer apply. And now we are blessed with societies to aid in the support of the Gospel at home, to extend it to the new settlements and through the earth.¹¹²⁶

While Boston experienced a period of revival in part due to the labors of Beecher, in upstate New York another revivalist was blazing a trail toward New England. Charles Finney's revivals starting in the mid-1820s had antecedents in the Scots-Irish revivals of the Cumberland Valley in Kentucky and Tennessee that began shortly after the turn of the century, with Cane Ridge being the most renowned.¹¹²⁷ These emotional camp meetings made their way northeastward, to the Western Reserve, Michigan, then to New York, where it contributed to the eclectic spiritual atmosphere that produced religious visionaries like Joseph Smith (1805-1844) and Charles Finney.¹¹²⁸ Threatened by Finney's brand of revivalism, in 1827 Beecher convened a group of New Divinity ministers, including Finney's most vocal critic, Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844), in New

¹¹²⁶ *The Memory of Our Fathers*, in BW 1:325.

¹¹²⁷ Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 3. See also Marilyn Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For the Trans-Atlantic context of the Cumberland Valley revivals, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

¹¹²⁸ Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee*, 44.

Lebanon, NY in order to reign him in.¹¹²⁹ Finney rebuffed their efforts, which attested to the unparalleled success of his “new measures,” of prolonged meetings lasting several days, the infamous “anxious bench” of sinners in anticipation of the slaying of the Holy Spirit, extreme emotionalism, rebukes against opposition, and other controversial revivalistic techniques.¹¹³⁰ Perhaps what most mortified New Divinity opposition to Finney was his claim to lead revivals “scientifically.”¹¹³¹ Beecher threatened he would be at the state line and fight Finney every foot of the way if he were to come to Boston.¹¹³² But when twenty of his own deacons demanded that Finney come lead a revival at the Hanover Street Church, Beecher relented.¹¹³³

The revivals of the Second Great Awakening reached its climax around 1831. Before reaching Boston, Finney led a successful revival in Andover, the place of New Divinity’s preeminent seminary.¹¹³⁴ While Finney was not the instigator of this phase of the Awakening in New England towns, similar to what George Whitefield had done for the First Great Awakening, Finney did for the latter, fanning the flickering flames of revival into a conflagration. One estimate, perhaps a bit inflated, claimed the Finney-led revivals increased church membership in New England by a third.¹¹³⁵ By the time Finney

¹¹²⁹ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition*, 22.

¹¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹¹³¹ Shiels, “The Scope of the Second Great Awakening,” 234.

¹¹³² Ibid.

¹¹³³ Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee*, 46.

¹¹³⁴ Shiels, “The Scope of the Second Great Awakening,” 234.

¹¹³⁵ Ibid., 235.

came to Hanover Street Church, both symbolically and in reality, Beecher's capitulation marked the end of New Divinity's dominance in New England. Beecher still considered himself an Edwardsean and a disciple of Timothy Dwight. However, increasingly he began to be one only nominally, more by tradition and association within his circle of co-workers than by theological persuasion. Hardly a doctrinaire, Beecher was ever the pragmatist when it came to the matter of conversion, whatever worked best was best. Beecher even began to adopt Methodist innovations in evangelization.¹¹³⁶ When Finney's scientific approach to the revivals was imitated by younger Congregationalists it confirmed the tipping of the scales in favor of human initiative over divine activity in the soteriology of the Second Great Awakening.¹¹³⁷

Beecher and the Millennial Turn

Beecher's strong millennialism was tied to his agenda of revival, national reform, and individual moralism. He had no patience for metaphysical or theological speculation. As a person of action in the age of social reform he was most interested in the concrete fruits of his labor. For Beecher, the upending of entire communities through revival and the change of moral character through reform was evidence that the millennial time was drawing near—"an earnest of that glorious time when a nation shall be born in a day."¹¹³⁸

¹¹³⁶ Christopher Adamson, "God's Continent Divided: Politics and Religion in Upper Canada and the Northern and Western United States, 1775-1841," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36, no. 3 (July 1994): 442.

¹¹³⁷ Adamson, "God's Continent Divided," 442.

¹¹³⁸ *The Memory of Our Fathers*, in BW 1:326.

Like many New Divinity millenarians, Beecher believed they were in the time of the sixth vial and the signs pointed to a hastening of days, as he wrote in a sermon, *A*

Reformation of Morals:

If we endure a Little longer, the resources of the millennial day will come to our aid. Many are the prophetic signs which declare the rapid approach of that day. Babylon the great is fallen...The day of his vengeance is wasting the earth. The last vial of the wrath of God is running...Soon will the responsive song be heard from every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, as the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Allelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. On the confines of such a day, shall we despair? While its blessed light is beginning to shine, shall we give up our laws and institutions, and sink down to the darkness and torments of the bottomless pit?¹¹³⁹

Beecher shared the millennial optimism of Timothy Dwight. But as with every New Divinity adherent Beecher and Dwight also embraced the tension of the afflictive model of progress inherent in the Edwardsean apocalyptic tradition. On the whole Beecher might have been even more ambiguous than Dwight on this matter. “The time has come when the experiment is to be made, whether the world is to be emancipated and rendered happy, or whether the whole creation shall groan and travail on together in pain, until the final consummation,” Beecher wrote.¹¹⁴⁰ Although Beecher shared much of the millennial DNA of his New Divinity mentors, he serves as the representative of the “millennial turn” away from Edwardsean apocalypticism. His departures can be summed up in three points: First, he shifted the locus of revival and reform from God’s sovereignty, the bedrock of Edwardsean cosmology, to human agency. Second, with his

¹¹³⁹ *A Reformation of Morals*, in BW 2:110.

¹¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 338.

crusading moralism, the controlling theme of Edwards-inspired revivalism shifted from redemption to reform. Third, with his move to Ohio in 1832 after the peak of revivals in New York and New England, Beecher shifted the geographic location of American civic millennialism from the East to the West.

The first significant break Beecher made with the Edwardsean tradition was in his affirmation of the modified Calvinism of Nathaniel William Taylor's New Haven theology. This rendition of Calvinism allowed Beecher the latitude to elevate human ability in the morphology of conversion. Beecher's reworked soteriology had implications on his eschatology. Reliance on human choice, though, was a double-edged sword. Based on the idea of history of progress it provided the humanistic foundations for Beecher's millennial optimism. But it also meant the future remained uncertain because it underpinned Beecher's belief that it would depend on how human beings respond to the gospel. Beecher's prognosis of the future was dependent on the question: Would there be sufficient moral regeneration of society? Given humanity's uneven history and in taking biblical prophecies at face value, Beecher accepted the commonly-held belief that before the millennium the church and the world would face trials and tribulations: "It is manifest from prophecy, and clearly to be anticipated from the existing state of the world, that great commotions and distress of nations will exist," wrote Beecher.

Beecher adopted much of the dualistic apocalyptic language employed by Timothy Dwight, which scholars like Kenneth Silverman used as evidence for the label of Manichaeism. Beecher thought the slaying of the witnesses was most likely to be a future event played out in the streets of papal lands as a way to stamp out vital

Christianity.¹¹⁴¹ It would probably be, wrote Beecher, “the result of moral causes in powerful operation.”¹¹⁴² It would be the enemy’s retaliation against the advances in Science, commerce, and evangelical religion, “the last struggle of those despotisms, to arrest the march of truth and freedom.”¹¹⁴³ In parallel with human advancement, as the millennium drew closer, the enemy’s activities would only increase. Warned Beecher, “It may be the collision between light and darkness,—between despotism and liberty,—which shall call out the kings of the earth to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.”¹¹⁴⁴ Beecher’s millennialism was not one of optimism, but one of militant action.¹¹⁴⁵ Beecher always despised hyper-Calvinistic fatalism and was not one to stand by while the world burned.

The ambiguities and ironies of Beecher’s Calvinism were reflected in his passive-aggressive relationship with Finney. In the lead up to the sweeping revivals of 1831, Finney had addressed the congregation of the Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester, NY a year earlier and sounded a prophetic tone, “God has made man a moral free agent,” and declared if Christians committed themselves to the conversion of the world, then the millennium would commence in three months.¹¹⁴⁶ This palpable sense of the immediacy

¹¹⁴¹ *Resources of the Adversary, and Means of their Destruction*, in BW 2:424-425.

¹¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁵ Adamson, “God’s Continent Divided,” 430.

¹¹⁴⁶ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3-4.

of having to contend with the eternal fate of one's soul was at the heart of the revivals in the "burned-over district" of upstate and western New York.¹¹⁴⁷ While New Divinity leaders, including Beecher, excoriated Finney for his human-centered revivals, what is striking about the Arminian-leaning revivalist language and millennial expectation of Finney is that it was not too far from Beecher's.

Even before the revivals began in upstate New York and Boston, in 1829 Ebenezer Porter (1772-1834), president of Andover, wrote a heart-felt letter to Beecher, his long-time friend, outlining his concerns about a number of rumors, hearsay, conversations, short discussions, and sermons that led him to question Beecher's commitment to Orthodox Calvinism.¹¹⁴⁸ In it Porter acknowledged Beecher's gift for organization and preaching but belittled his theological prowess, writing: "But then I do not think you a metaphysician born to tear up the foundations laid by Edwards. You are a rhetorician and a popular reasoner."¹¹⁴⁹ Porter warned Beecher to reconsider his position regarding an overemphasis on human free agency at the expense of human dependence on God. And he challenged Beecher to distance himself from the slipperiness and obscurity of Taylor's New Haven Theology "before this Rubicon is passed."¹¹⁵⁰

¹¹⁴⁷ For the Finney revivals see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950).

¹¹⁴⁸ "Dr Porter's Letter," in ACELB 2:159-167.

¹¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

Beecher responded to the letter with an emotional point-by-point defense that would prove to be a dress rehearsal for the later heresy trials of 1835-36 over many of the same issues broached by Porter. Beecher asserted he had no Rubicon to pass and he was as fundamentally as Orthodox as any in doctrine, but that in matters of employing mental philosophies of nature (i.e., Scottish Common-sense Realism), there was room for debate.¹¹⁵¹ If he were guilty of anything, it was in the bending of language, as Beecher retorted, “but as to my hyperboles and metaphors, alas! I shall despair of ever reducing them to logical precision, but shall probably go on sinning as I have done.”¹¹⁵² Beecher always defended his and Taylor’s rebalancing of Calvinist foundations as Orthodox, but by the 1830s, as the Finneyites became more successful in revivalism through emphasizing human freedom, Beecher felt he had no choice but to adjust to a more individualized and secularized conception of the human self. But within the next decade, even Beecher’s defanged Calvinist methods of reform and revival were not sufficient in slowing Methodist and Baptist gains.

Beecher’s second major departure from New Divinity millennialism was in reprioritizing reform over redemption in the overall framework of revivalism. While Edwardsean conception of redemption was a forward-looking seal of the work of God from God’s eternal viewpoint, Beecher’s reform programs were focused on the here-and-now of individuals and communities, with a belief in the human ability to effect change. Beecher’s relentless pursuit of millennial fulfillment through goal-oriented methods

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid., 169.

¹¹⁵² Ibid., 190.

explains his near obsession with social and moral reform. This was an arena where one could see immediate results. In 1803, after experiencing a revival in his first parish of East Hampton, CT, with the congregation reverting back to a time of spiritual dullness, Beecher began experimenting with a strategic plan that was being implemented all over New England. He established the Moral Society of East Hampton and the following year he published his first sermon regarding the society's role: *The Practicability of Suppressing Vice, By Means of Societies Instituted for that Purpose*.¹¹⁵³ In it Beecher expressed his theological anthropology, "The majority are in the beginning moral. They have the power, and if awake, the inclination, to limit the prevalence of vice."¹¹⁵⁴ Beecher wanted the moral society to be a vehicle where he could extend his sphere of influence well beyond the limits of his congregation and into the community at large. But even then East Hampton was too small a theater for Beecher's more ambitious spiritual goals.

Beecher seized the opportunity to expand his reform program when Vice President Burr shot and killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804, allowing Beecher to follow up his moral society sermon with *The Remedy for Duelling*, preached at the opening session of the Presbytery of Long Island in 1806 and published three years later.¹¹⁵⁵ Beecher declared dueling "a great and alarming national sin," a contagion

¹¹⁵³ Richard Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self in Everyday Life: The Transformation of Personal Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 81. Lyman Beecher, *The Practicability of Suppressing Vice, By Means of Societies Instituted for that Purpose* (New London, CT: Samuel Green, 1804).

¹¹⁵⁴ Beecher, *The Practicability of Suppressing Vice*, 3-6. Quoted in Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 40.

¹¹⁵⁵ Lyman Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling, A Sermon, Delivered Before the Presbytery of Long-Island* (New York: J. Seymour, 1809).

breeding countless copycats, for “the blood of the duellists is the seed of duelling, as really as the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.”¹¹⁵⁶ The sermon brought Beecher notice and a national audience. Beecher also politicized the affair, offering that the only solution was to exercise the voice of the moral majority by voting such immoral people out of office.¹¹⁵⁷ In another sermon, *Resources of the Adversary, and Means of their Destruction*, Beecher reiterated his emphasis on revival and reform:

Revivals of religion are alone adequate to the moral reformation of the world. All other means — science, legislation, philosophy, eloquence, and argument — have been relied on in vain. The disease is of the heart, and they reach it not. But revivals touch the deep springs of human action, and give tone and energy to the moral government of God.¹¹⁵⁸

Beecher targeted concrete sins of the nation in order to energize moral societies in combating vice. He gave a national diagnosis. “But there is a sickness of the heart which they could neither endure nor heal; and with this same disease this nation is sick,” Beecher exclaimed, and no amount of the nation’s advancement and prosperity could address it, excepting this; “there is but one remedy, and that is the preaching of the Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from on high.”¹¹⁵⁹ Although the only remedy against sin was the preaching of the Gospel, the responsibility of a sanctified life was still upon the shoulders of the sinner. According to Richard Rabinowitz, Beecher’s prodigious efforts at moral reform, from intemperance, to Sabbath-breaking, fornication, gambling,

¹¹⁵⁶ Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling*, 34.

¹¹⁵⁷ Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan*, 58.

¹¹⁵⁸ *Resources of the Adversary, and Means of their Destruction*, in BW 2:437.

¹¹⁵⁹ *The Memory of Our Fathers*, in BW 1:332.

his strong anti-Catholicism, and eventually even questioning the institution of slavery signaled a religious shift from a person's soul to a person's moral character, what is referred to as *moralism*.¹¹⁶⁰ This does not mean Beecher undermined personal conversion and the eternal state of the soul. But the "evangelical moralism" that Beecher advanced became, as Rabinowitz argues, "a this-worldly movement within American religion," and a transition from doctrine (Hopkinsianism) to morality (Beecherism).¹¹⁶¹

Edwards had warned against the prevailing trend toward moralism in his sermon, *City on a Hill*, where he observed, "And the country seems, in [a] great part of it, to be got into another way of thinking of things of religion, looking chiefly at morality and a sober life. And then another great prejudice in the country has been the late extraordinary growth of Arminianism, or doctrines that savor of it, especially amongst those that are set to teach others."¹¹⁶² By Beecher's time, however, the Scottish Common-Sense school of thought was adopted by most evangelical Calvinists. As Mark Noll, quoting Norman Fiering, writes, Beecher was "uniquely suited" to an era that "required a broader platform of universal ethics" than the ecclesiastically-oriented one of Edwards.¹¹⁶³ This amalgam of individualism and human agency, according to Noll, "rooted true virtue in

¹¹⁶⁰ Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self*, 83.

¹¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹¹⁶² *City on a Hill* in WJE 19: 552.

¹¹⁶³ Noll, *America's God*, 103, 106, 113.

supernatural conversion yet created conditions for a new concept of virtuous living available to every person by nature alone.”¹¹⁶⁴

This terrain of revival and moral reform was not new to Beecher. Even before he moved to a much larger congregation in Litchfield, CT in 1810, some stirrings began before he left East Hampton. In his farewell sermon he looked back at what he taught them through his ministry, offering a list of Calvinist orthodox teachings, but adding, “Especially has the duty of uniting your influence to suppress vice and immorality been explained...”¹¹⁶⁵ The thrust of the sermon was evangelical conversion and to those still unconverted in his ministry, he continued to excoriate them with the charge:

And what shall I say to you, my dear hearers, of decent lives and impenitent hearts, to whom, through the whole period of my ministry, God by me has called in vain? God is my witness that I have greatly desired and earnestly sought the salvation of your souls, and I had hoped before the close of my ministry to be able to present you as dear children to God. But I shall not. My ministry is ended, and you are not saved.¹¹⁶⁶

Beecher continued the dual strategy of revival and reform in Litchfield, preaching a sermon, *A Reformation of Morals Practicable and Indispensable*, where he wrote that “The commands of God are the measure and the evidence of human ability. He is not a hard master, reaping where he has not sowed, and gathering where he has not strawed. The way of the Lord is not unequal: he never demands of men the performance of

¹¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁶⁵ Beecher, ACELB 1:199.

¹¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 202. Partially quoted in Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan*: 61.

impossibilities.”¹¹⁶⁷ Making a moral choice, for Beecher, was not the impossibility Consistent Calvinists had made out to be.¹¹⁶⁸ The ability to make the right choice consistently was evidence of one’s saving grace. The impulse, then, was toward maximizing the horizons of sacralizing earthly matters. Beecher called for every level of society, from the government to schools, local societies, voluntary associations, and especially the much neglected family unit to come together in one front in the fight for moral influence, to fortify every institution under the aegis of public virtue.¹¹⁶⁹ The sermon resulted in the organization of the Connecticut Society for the Suppression of Vice and the Promotion of Good Morals in 1813.¹¹⁷⁰ Throughout his ministry Beecher continued to see revival through the lens of reform. But by the end of the Second Great Awakening Beecher saw the radical reformers moving ahead of him in matters of slavery and politics. Beecher would be reminded that human agency was unpredictable. Only his hope in the millennium was certain. For Edwards, God’s redemptive work was at the heart of revivals. Redemption would lead to moral reform. But Beecher’s militancy against vice and immorality reprioritized the order by emphasizing reform over redemption. Toward the latter decade of his life, however, Beecher’s eyes were set upon

¹¹⁶⁷ Lyman Beecher, *A Reformation of Morals Practicable and Indispensable in Beecher’s Works: Sermons Delivered on Various Occasions*, vol. 2 (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), 84. Quoted in Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self*, 90.

¹¹⁶⁸ Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self*, 92-93.

¹¹⁶⁹ Beecher, *A Reformation of Morals*, 93-105.

¹¹⁷⁰ Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 47.

the millennium. Even his moralism took a back seat to his commitment to evangelization the world in preparation for the millennium.

The third major step Beecher took in his departure from Edwardsean apocalyptic thought was in relocating the theater of millennial significance from Puritan New England to the Western frontier. In 1832 Beecher felt the seat of religious importance shifting to the vast territory of the West.¹¹⁷¹ This geographic realignment of the historical-redemptive center from East to West was part of Beecher's civic millennialism, a program initiated by Timothy Dwight who saw in America the final fulfillment of biblical prophecy. While at the height of his fame and influence, Beecher moved to Cincinnati to fill the presidency of the incipient Lane Theological Seminary. The closest Beecher got to writing a millennial treatise was in his *A Plea for the West* in 1835, where he outlined the reformation necessary for the coming of Christ's kingdom. He wrote:

It is certain that the glorious things spoken of the church and of the world, as affected by her prosperity, cannot come to pass under the existing civil organization of the nations. Such a state of society as is predicted to pervade the earth, cannot exist under an arbitrary despotism, and the predominance of feudal institutions and usages. Of course, it is predicted that revolutions and distress of nations will precede the introduction of the peaceful reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. The mountains shall be cast down, and the valleys shall be exalted—and he shall “overturn, and overturn, and overturn, till he whose right it is, shall reign King of nations—King of saints.”¹¹⁷²

Beecher adapted a civic millennialism that was eschewed by Edwards, Bellamy, Hopkins, and even Dwight to a certain degree. Ironically, Beecher attributed the genesis

¹¹⁷¹ Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati, OH: Truman & Smith, 1835), 11.

¹¹⁷² Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 9.

of America's role in the civic millennialism to Edwards, writing: "It was the opinion of Edwards, that the millenium would commence in America. When I first encountered this opinion, I thought it chimerical; but all providential developments since, and all the existing signs of the times, lend corroboration to it."¹¹⁷³ It is certainly interesting that Beecher seems to have overlooked Edwards's later denials and it reflects the ambiguities in apocalyptic positions that allowed for liberal reinterpretations according to one's agenda. Regardless, Beecher used Edwards's own words to transpose the New England-centric millennial speculations of Cotton Mather, Samuel Sewall, Timothy Dwight, and Edward Dorr Griffin to the vast, open territory of the West. Declared Beecher:

But if this nation is, in the providence of God, destined to lead the way in the moral and political emancipation of the world, it is time she understood her high calling, and were harnessed for the work. For mighty causes, like floods from distant mountains, are rushing with accumulating power, to their consummation of good or evil, and soon our character and destiny will be stereotyped forever.¹¹⁷⁴

The millennial destiny of the world was contingent upon the moral character of America as a whole. Furthermore, the vanguard of truth, freedom, economic and scientific flourishing, and most importantly, morality, would no longer be New England, but the West. Beecher added, "It is equally plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West."¹¹⁷⁵ The nation had a choice—either usher in the millennium through moral rectitude or establish an "atheistical" political millennium as

¹¹⁷³ Ibid., 9-10.

¹¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

“to make way for the millennium of reason and nature, in which man may live without God, and obey the flesh without shame, and die without fear.”¹¹⁷⁶ Beecher went to work in building up his millennial-focused institutions in the West, but his time was without controversy.

Underlying the militant millennial beckoning of *A Plea for the West*, however, was an implied anti-Catholicism and xenophobia. Beecher had long been troubled by America’s growing pluralism, both religious and racial. At the turn of the century in 1800, Congregationalism was still the dominant theological force in America but there were signs of its declining influence. In sheer numbers the Baptists recently outnumbered the Congregationalists 100,000 to 80,000 with the gap quickly increasing.¹¹⁷⁷ Moreover, Catholics outnumbered Presbyterians.¹¹⁷⁸ Beecher’s relocation to the West was in a way a preemptive move to build up a Calvinist evangelical army to stem the tide of Catholic influence.¹¹⁷⁹ In *A Plea for the West*, Beecher anticipated a time of a million uneducated voters “without intelligence or conscience, or patriotism, or property, and driven on by demagogues to forbid recoil and push us over, in a moment all may be lost.”¹¹⁸⁰ To make clear which segment of the population he was referring to Beecher wrote:

This danger from uneducated mind [*sic*] is augmenting daily by the rapid influx of foreign emigrants, unacquainted with our institutions,

¹¹⁷⁶ *The Being of a God* in BW 1: 22-23, 59.

¹¹⁷⁷ Edwin G. Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 35-63. Referenced in Harding, *Lyman Beecher and the Transformation of American Protestantism*, 35.

¹¹⁷⁸ Harding, *Lyman Beecher and the Transformation of American Protestantism*, 35.

¹¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 400-401.

¹¹⁸⁰ Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 49.

unaccustomed to self-government, inaccessible to education, and easily accessible to prepossession, and inveterate credulity, and intrigue, and easily embodied and wielded by sinister design. In the beginning this eruption of revolutionary Europe was not anticipated, and we opened our doors wide to the influx and naturalization of foreigners. But it is becoming a terrific inundation; it has increased upon our native population from five to thirty-seven per cent, and is every year advancing. It seeks, of course, to settle down upon the unoccupied territory of the West, and may at no distant day equal, and even outnumber the native population. What is to be done to educate the millions which in twenty years Europe will pour out upon us?¹¹⁸¹

Beecher was convinced that Catholic emigrants would lead to the nation's moral decay.

“As a general fact, uneducated mind is educated vice,” he warned.¹¹⁸²

Beecher's move out West did not protect him from theological opposition.

Conservatives in Ohio actually followed through on their threats to bring him to trial. In 1835-36 Beecher had to defend himself before the Presbytery as to his orthodoxy.¹¹⁸³ As if to usurp Beecher's vision of the West as he did to Beecher's revivals in the East, Finney took a position as president of a rival school to Lane Seminary after a mass exodus of students over the issue of Beecher's wavering support for immediate abolitionism. Many ended up in Finney's rival institution, Oberlin College.¹¹⁸⁴ Neither Beecher's heresy trial nor the Lane debacle deterred Beecher. In a letter presented at his heresy trial from the Board of Directors of Lane Seminary, it outlined why Beecher was called to the presidency:

¹¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹¹⁸² Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁸³ Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee*, 73.

¹¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 57-61.

The Church is now, doubtless, entering into the most eventful period of her most glorious enterprise, in speedily sending the Gospel to every creature, and subjugating the world to the Prince of Peace. To accomplish this great work, we want, indeed, hundreds and thousands of additional laborers; but we need, more especially, in the character of those who come forth, to see men of higher and holier enterprise than most of us who have entered the ministry. Do we not need, and must we not have, if the millennium is ever to come, men of evangelical and deep-toned piety; baptized into the spirit of revivals.¹¹⁸⁵

Indeed, Beecher's militant millennialism helped recruit hundreds and thousands of pious, reform-minded workers for the West. But unlike Edwards, Beecher's legacy remains ambiguous and he bears no spiritual lineage. The storehouse of Beecher's followers is surprisingly bare.¹¹⁸⁶ But perhaps just as surprisingly his xenophobic plea for the West has been difficult to extricate from America even after so many generations.

Chapter Conclusion

If Edward Dorr Griffin was the quintessential New Divinity spokesperson for the third generation Edwardseans, Lyman Beecher is representative of all the ambiguities and tensions of trying to navigate between a millennial outlook and the secularizing forces of modernity. The millennial turn of Beecher contains many layers. It consisted of apocalyptic thought from an Edwardsean aesthetic, a certain way of viewing and appreciating the cosmic picture of salvation history and creation's redemption as a masterpiece of God's sovereignty, to one emphasizing a personal and national morality, an ascetic ethics based on avoiding vice and engaging in militant social action. H.

¹¹⁸⁵ *Trial before Presbytery* in BW 3:188-189.

¹¹⁸⁶ Rugoff, *The Beechers*, 296-297. Rugoff asserts that within a generation of Beecher's death he was seen as a product of a bygone era. Even Beecher's children, especially his famous daughters, Catharine and Harriet, rejected his religious system.

Richard Niebuhr expressed the sentiment when he wrote that Protestantism shifted Christianity from the “mode of life primarily interested in structure to one primarily directed toward action.”¹¹⁸⁷ The forty-year period of antebellum America was a time where the awareness of old social issues created an era in search of innovative action. Within evangelical Calvinism, Lyman Beecher was equipped for the task. Even the geography of revivals contributed to the atmosphere of change. Whereas initially the Awakening was centered around the rural and frontier areas of New England the latter revivals moved south and westward with many centered in the cities, which shed light on the growing concerns of urbanization caused by the burgeoning effects of the Industrial Revolution.¹¹⁸⁸ With so many issues at stake, the focus of even the more theologically-oriented Edwardseans changed from doctrine to social reform. Beecher was not the cause of this change but his life reflects the complexities of the transitions in the shaping of society and ideas. During Beecher’s time emerging socio-religious factors reached a tipping point. Beecher’s unfortunate responses went hand in hand with his militant millennial vision for America. With his xenophobia, a turn toward a white Protestant populism, proto-nationalism, and an ambiguous stance on slavery, in many ways Beecher’s millennialism reflects the worst of Edwardsean apocalypticism’s negative impulses. Unfortunately, these impulses are some of the long-lasting vestiges that remain in certain iterations of American evangelicalism.

¹¹⁸⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, “The Protestant Movement and Democracy in the United States,” in *Shaping of American Religion*, ed. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, LLC, 2012), 20-71. Quoted in Mathews, “Organization Process,” 30.

¹¹⁸⁸ Niebuhr, “The Protestant Movement and Democracy,” 20-71.

CONCLUSION

At the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting in Columbus, OH in 2015, delegates of America's largest protestant denomination could not have missed the huge banners and various advertisements with "Great Awakening" emblazoned in big bold print. Under the heading were three phrases: "Clear Agreement," "Visible Union," and "Extraordinary Prayer." Most of the attendants would not have had trouble associating the "Great Awakening" with Jonathan Edwards. But not many, I presume, would have recognized the three phrases as having been taken from the subtitle of Edwards's *Humble Attempt*. Here was a historical reference to a significant event in American religious history with phrases taken from one of Edwards's most apocalyptic work. Yet the conference was largely devoid of apocalyptic elements or millennial significance. This is reflective of the general unevenness of American evangelicalism's relationship to eschatology. Great interest remains in the speculative and apocalyptic but is often divorced from a clearly articulated belief system. Even within the SBC there is a wide range of beliefs. As there is no clear agreement on eschatological matters, it is often easier to overlook the subject altogether.

This dissertation has been a narrative journey seeking not to overlook one important line of American evangelical eschatology. In many ways the conclusion seeks to find connections between the past, our current times, and possibly the future. It is interested in the legacy of Edwards's historical-redemptive apocalypticism in order to seek greater clarity in the present. During the paper wars over the revival legacy of Jonathan Edwards, both Beecher and the Edwardseans and the Finneyites tried to

appropriate Edwards to their cause. In 1829, Beecher tried to claim for himself and the New Divinity-led revivals as the legitimate heirs of Edwardsean revivalism by stating, “most that is at present desirable in the religious aspect of things among us may be directly traced to the influence of men who were trained and instructed in the revival of 1740.”¹¹⁸⁹ Finney, too, tried to align himself within the colonial revival tradition of Edwards by referring to Edwards’s *Some Thoughts* to defend his modern methods and to criticize the critics of his revivals as railing against the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁹⁰ Thus began the historiographical process of situating Edwards, the revival tradition, and the religious history of the First Great Awakening within the context of the latter Awakening.¹¹⁹¹ This was attempted by Joseph Tracy (1793-1874), who tried to adjudicate between the two camps by objectively chronicling both the highs and lows of the First Great Awakening. As Tracy wrote in the preface to the work: “For the last ten years, too, the advocates of all kinds of ‘measures,’ new and old, have been asserting that the events and results of that revival justified their several theories and practices. There was, therefore, evident need of a work, which should furnish the means of suitably appreciating both the good and the evil of that period of religious history.”¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁸⁹ Conforti, “The Invention of the Great Awakening,” 113. From “Letters on the Introduction and Progress of Unitarianism in New England,” in *The Spirit of the Pilgrims* (1829).

¹¹⁹⁰ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards and Religious Tradition*, 23.

¹¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17-35.

¹¹⁹² Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1842), iii. Quoted in Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards and Religious Tradition*, 31.

As for historical objectivity Joseph Tracy had a New Divinity background so his account is overall celebratory of Edwards role in the revival. But given the circumstances of Tracy's writing he seems to appropriate the non-eschatological account of Edward's *Faithful Narrative* of the little revival of Northampton, that is, Tracy's account largely ignores millennial themes. It was not as if Tracy was uninterested in the end times as in 1839 he wrote, *The Three Last Things*, a work devoted to scriptural exegesis on prophetic passages in the Bible.¹¹⁹³ But even in this work on prophetic passages Tracy was intentionally avoiding disputation. The work is devoid of any mention of the millennium, apocalypse, Antichrist, and does even mention Revelation. It signals the sea change that occurred among the Edwardsean tradition that after Beecher there was no one to carry on the strong millennialism of New Divinity thought. It was reflective of the intellectual climate where even Edwardseans joined the liberal Calvinists and the Unitarians in moving away from more radical forms of thinking, whereby millennial speculation fell under the domain of the radical and non-mainline sects. For nearly one hundred years Edwardsean eschatology was swept aside in favor of his more presentable works on philosophy and ethics.

This was the sign of the times. In the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a shift from the other-worldly concerns of millennialism with this-worldly agenda of building up the kingdom of Christ on earth. Along with this project of Protestant empire-building we can also begin to see what Joseph Haroutunian refers to as the transition

¹¹⁹³ Joseph Tracy, *The Three Last Things: The Resurrection of the Body, the Day of Judgment, and Final Retribution* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1839).

from a focus on piety to moralism. In the inaugural issue of *CEM* dated July, 1800, the editors laid out the publication's evangelical agenda:

Essays on the doctrines of Christianity, and on religious, experimental, and moral subjects:— occasional remarks on the fulfillment of scripture prophecies in the present day, and expositions of difficult and doubtful passages of scriptures:— Religious intelligence concerning the state of Christ's Kingdom, throughout the Christian world, and sketches of the original ecclesiastical concerns of this country:—Information respecting Missions to the new settlements in the United States and Among Heathen Nations:—Narratives of revivals of religion in particular places together with distinguishing marks of true and false religion; accounts of remarkable dispensations of divine Providence:—Biographical sketches of persons eminent for piety:—Original hymns on evangelical subjects:—Together with whatever else on the subject of religion and morals may contribute to the advancement of genuine piety and pure morality.¹¹⁹⁴

The editorial above fits the historical analysis of the transition that occurred, with millennialism being supplanted by the prevalence of kingdom language. All the issues of the first year of *CEM* only contain a few references to a “happy millennium” but numerous instances of “Christ’s kingdom” or the “kingdom of God.” Even in the stated goal for *CEM* for “the advancement of genuine piety and pure morality,” we can see the equal regard given to piety and morality. In regard to this transition E Brooks Holifield writes that by the latter half of the nineteenth century, the new Calvinist theologians “replaced the older millennial theories with a doctrine of the kingdom of God that accented the ethical strands within the prophetic tradition.”¹¹⁹⁵

¹¹⁹⁴ *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, vol. I, no. 1, (July 1800): 3. Heretofore referred to as *CEM*.

¹¹⁹⁵ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 507.

To be sure, the nationalistic, militant, moralistic millennialism espoused by Beecher was not a complete departure from Edwards, Bellamy, or Hopkins. In many ways it was already anticipated by Dwight a generation earlier. But Beecher and his counterparts of the Edwardsean tradition left no spiritual and theological heirs. Beecher's harkening back to the faith of the first generation settlers in his *The Memory of our Fathers* became just that—a distant memory. His journal, *The Spirit of the Pilgrims*, highlights the contradictions between being spiritual pilgrims without an earthly home with the empire-building project of establishing an enduring spiritual base on earth. When Beecher opened the door to a critical examination of Edwardsean foundations it had reverberating effects. For Edwards and the Edwardseans tried their best to reconcile God's sovereignty with human responsibility. But whenever there was any doubt they always erred on the side of God. The New Haven theology of Nathaniel William Taylor and the practical ministry of Lyman Beecher tilted that calculus to give humans equal footing, and in practice, even erring on the side of human ability.

This shift had indirect effects on Edwardsean apocalyptic thought. By the midpoint of the Second Great Awakening Beecher's revivalism was superseded by the Finneyites. In reform, Beecher and the New Divinity institutions could not keep up with the more radical reformers, especially the immediate abolitionists. In missions they lost ground to Methodists and Baptists. Edwardsean millennialism, too, would fade into the background amidst the emergence of inventive, progressive millennial sects like the Shakers, Mormons, and Millerites.¹¹⁹⁶ By 1840, while Protestant evangelicals celebrated

¹¹⁹⁶ Harrison, *The Second Coming*, 163-206.

the centennial of the First Great Awakening, they did not realize the irony that they were also marking the end of the second. Along with the end of Awakening was the end of the dominance of the Edwardsean legacy in New England. Beecher's millennial turn toward social reform signaled the beginnings of the eventual fall of the Benevolent Empire in antebellum America.

Edwardsean historical-redemptive apocalypticism was marked by three main characteristics: revivalistic, afflictive, and cosmic. His followers had varied success in implementing his apocalyptic thought. But to a large degree they were able to sustain the Edwardsean apocalyptic narrative for nearly a hundred years. Over the course of the dissertation, one of my arguments has been that the New Divinity's use of eschatology as a tool that transcended space and time for the critique of church and society has been underappreciated. Edwards's role as a prophetic voice can be best understood in light of his apocalyptic thought. And this voice is still needed in our understanding of various iterations of modern day evangelicalism, which in recent times has been focused on the social and political issues surrounding the culture wars. In terms of the study of eschatology, the premillennial-tribulation iterations and the rapture narratives of fundamentalists have dominated the evangelical end-times agenda. It seems Edwardsean apocalyptic thought mostly lies outside the purview of modern evangelical theological discussions of eschatology.¹¹⁹⁷ But one cannot fully comprehend let alone appreciate the roots of modern day evangelical eschatology without first understanding the evangelical

¹¹⁹⁷ For the eschatology of modern day evangelicalism see Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004).

apocalyptic thought of Edwards and his disciples during the crucial period between the two Awakenings. Beginning in the 1740s, the period saw the rise of Edwardsean apocalypticism and a century later by 1840, its fall. But many of its elements remain. The recurring themes covered over the course of the dissertation—revivalism, redemption, reform as eschatological categories—are traceable all the way back to America’s founding fathers.¹¹⁹⁸ But the corollary sub-themes such as proto-nationalism, populism, pluralism, racism, xenophobia can also be evaluated in light of evangelical eschatology and they have been with us far longer than since the Civil War or the Scopes Monkey Trial. They have also been with us since the beginning and are worthwhile to revisit, debate, and shed new light on as American evangelicalism looks to its eschatological future.

¹¹⁹⁸ As 2020 marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims to America, it is especially instructive to look to the Puritan past in order to better understand America’s historical underpinnings.

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